The political, cultural and philosophical concern of the Roman pagan aristocracy regarding Christianity in the beginning of the fifth century – The example of senator Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus.

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Yleisen kirkkohistorian pro gradu- tutkielma

Tammikuu 2016

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO – HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET

Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion	Laitos – Institution
Teologinen tiedekunta	Kirkkohistoria

Tekijä – Författare
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Työn nimi – Arbetets titel
The political, cultural and philosophical concern of the Roman pagan aristocracy regarding Christianity in the beginning of the fifth century – The example of senator Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusinaus.

Oppiaine – Läroämne
Yleinen kirkkohistoria

Tiivistelmä – Referat

My master's thesis discusses the last waves of resistance to of the traditional pagan Roman aristocracy and the new, now already quite established Christian aristocratic class in the beginning of the fifth century. Paganism had lost ground in Rome and had begun to merge into the growing wave of Christianity. My primary source is the case of a Roman pagan senator, Volusianus, and the correspondence he had with Bishop Augustine, with the aid of their mutual friend Marcellinus. Volusianus will represent in this thesis the side of the pagan aristocrat that comes from tradition and long ancestory, and even though born in a Christian Empire, he is brought up as a pagan and more importantly, a future senator of Rome. Volusianus shares the same concern pagan members of his class have felt ever since the removal of the pagan Altar of Victory from the Senate House, a symbolic sign from the imperial rule what religion is preferred: The Rome of his fathers is not the Rome he lives in. I will be using as additional sources the Third Relatio from senator Symmachus on behalf of re-instating the Altar, and also Saturnalia by Macrobius, a text written after Volusianus's correspondence. As the Third Relatio will show the state of shock among the senators for this attack on their way of life, Saturnalia is a nostalgic view on a lost cultural heritage and an homage to the men who were seen as upholding all that is glorious about Rome, including Volusianus's father.
I will mostly focus on the reactions of the pagans. The Church could not succeed without the Roman super elite, and the Christian Emperor needed the Senate, as did the Senate need the Emperor. Why then, in a time that would seem to encourage conversion to Christianity was paganism and upholding it a matter of such devotion to these men who were, after all, imperial officials in a Christian Empire? Senators like Volusianus seems to show no great enthusiasm for Christianity, in fact he seems to look down on it slighty. But at the same time he is not zealous against it, and lives and works among his Christian family members and collegues. The concern Volusianus has is that of a Roman official; He is not sure Christianity is rational and not just tales of magicians and strange moral codes, a foreign religion that is simply not fitting for the educated citizen. He fears that Christ's teachings are a way for foreign powers to take advantage of Rome and they would ruin her reputation as a formidable enemy. For him, Christianity does not seem to be anything terribly evil to avoid, but certainly not the best choice for the Empire. By looking at his social, cultural and philosophical background we can have a clearer insight into how Christianity in the beginning of the fifth century was seen by the very members it needed to impress

Työn laji – Arbetets art	Aika – Datum	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal
Pro gradu- tutkielma	18.3.2016	85

Avainsanat – Nyckelord
Volusianus, pagan, senatorial aristocracy, 5th century Rome

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe
Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, Keskustakampuksen kirjasto, Teologia

Muita tietoja

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis discusses the transition period in Roman elite society and its religious sphere in the beginning of the fifth century when the elite of Roman society, the senatorial and aristocratic class, was living with a new Christian religion in the Empire and a distant Emperor far from Rome. I will look at the remaining opposition against Christianity among the Roman elite after the official end of state paganism, and the main reasons a Roman aristocrat living in a fifth century Christian Empire would still have been somewhat reluctant to join the new official state Church. This thesis will look at the political, cultural and philosophical issues Roman aristocratic pagans had against Christianity in the beginning of the fifth century, and the reasons why the new imperial trend of converting to Christianity was not actively followed by many members of the most prominent late antiquity social class, the traditional Roman senatorial elite, that consisted of the oldest and most prominent Roman families. As a principal source I will use the correspondence between a Roman pagan aristocrat from the senatorial class, Rufius Agrypnius Volusianus, a Roman Christian aristocrat, tribune Flavius Marcellinus, and the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine. Our main focus is on Volusianus and the pagan reaction to Christianity and the new rise in criticism against the new state religion after the sack of Rome in the year 410. On the defending side in the correspondence is bishop Augustine and as a kind of a mediator is a Christian Roman aristocrat, Marcellinus.

Volusianus lived in an officially Christian Empire that was still very much pagan both in culture and in practice. The pagan rites for the protection of Rome were still practiced and the importance of studying and remembering the old ways of the ancestors had only increased in the minds of the Roman aristocrats who were living in a world of cultural rupture. The Empire was not the same as it was, Emperor Constantine had moved to Constantinople with his court and along with him Rome had lost its place as the absolute center of the Empire. The city also suffered a devastating siege when Alaric the Visigoth attacked and sacked Rome in 410. Volusianus's generation was one of an uncertain present and gilded nostalgia for a glorious past, and as Peter Brown wrote, the generation piled after a time they themselves had never seen, as they were born in a new, Christian Empire.

When studying the aristocracy's response to Christianity I will look at the question from three angles, from the perspective of political concern that related

to the continued prosperity of the Empire, cultural issues that made the transition to Christianity less tempting, and finally philosophical issues and why the Christian mindset was a difficult one to adapt for the Roman elite. Volusianus singles out many of these issues in his letter to Augustine, ranging from difficult theological questions like the the virginity of Mary, philosophical issues such as the teachings of Christianity and how they comply or how they don't comply with roman virtue, and finally to the consideration whether Christianity is beneficiary for the welfare of the Empire. The letter conveys a fear very real for the oldest and most elite Roman families. The Empire was changing into something new and it had become vastly multicultural. The Roman aristocracy had based their lives on their status, their traditional place as the highest class as senators, onto the idea of tradition and continuation. Their right to rule was largely based on lineage and family wealth, in order to be a senator one needed to own a certain amount of land. But love of tradition was more than just justifying the aristocracy's position in society. Repeating the traditions of old and keeping to the faith of the ancestors was crucial to a Roman aristocrat, since as long as Rome kept her ways and honored her gods, she would remain. The senators were to act as priests to the state cult, and as we see in Symmachus's *Third Relatio*, the removal of the pagan Altar of Victory from Rome's Senate caused severe concern that Rome itself was in danger if the senators could not perform the proper sacrifices before a session. This fear that Rome was in danger of losing the protection of the gods was heightened when Alaric the Visigoth attacked Rome in 410 and left it severely damaged and robbed. Among many Romans the sack was blamed on the lack of state rites; Rome had abandoned her gods, and now the gods would abandon her.

Volusianus's letter also conveys a nostalgia of a golden past of Roman virtue and might in turbulent times when Rome was still in post-traumatic state. He is worried that the Christian way of life was too far away from the Roman way. This is one of the key problems I intend to discuss in this thesis, Volusianus's generation lived, in my view, in a state of gilded nostalgia for a glorious past now being destroyed right in front of their eyes. This sense of nostalgia is a key element in my view as to why the pagan roman aristocrats were disinclined to openly embrace the religion and the changes to the Empire, even though violent opposition hardly ever came in to place, and it was not uncommon to change one's religion to follow the religion of the Emperor. This circle of the nostalgic felt a great sense of dissatisfaction in the age they were living in, and in

the turmoil and uncertainty of the early fifth century it must have been easy to long for a better time, now long past. This strong sense of nostalgia was also an opposition to the ruling majority of Christians. Since, in my view, this feeling of having lost one's cultural identity was strongly felt among the aristocracy, and for that reason I will also discuss the beginning of what some scholars call a pagan revival or even a pagan rebellion, a strongly exaggerated term for a debate that raged over the Altar of Victory in the Senate in the 380's and the suppression of pagan religious practice in the state. For this I will use the *Third Relatio* by Symmachus, a plead sent to the Christian Emperor Gratian to reinstate the Altar and allow religious pagan traditions. I will also look at Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, and how the text, written in the 430's, shows the nostalgia still felt among the elite of the Empire even 50 years after the first blow against traditional paganism and thus the traditional Roman life. Saturnalia is a praise of paganism and tradition, and the fact that it was most probably written by an aristocratic Christian shows how this nostalgia extended beyond personal religious association, it was commonly shared among the entire class.

The Roman elite of Volusianus's generation was born in to this nostalgia, their fathers having been senators of Rome, proud of tradition and the ways of the ancestors. They were, however, born in a Christian Empire, and the glorious past of Rome was something they read in books and were told in stories. In their mind Rome began to crumble as Christianity took over, the old gods of Rome left because they were no longer honored and Rome was left for her own devices, and consequently suffered. The Church was trying to defend Christianity against these accusations, and clergy men like Bishop Augustine, who represents the side of educated Christian Romans, were trying to change the image of Christianity from the reason of decline into the next step of great piety and knowledge, a new philosophical trend. Augustine was the son of a lower level roman official in the African province, a pagan at birth and received a classical roman education, becoming a teacher in rhetoric. At the time of the correspondence he had however become the bishop of Hippo. He had also grown up with the traditions and rites of the ancestors, but he was from North Africa, not from Rome, and did not belong to the highest of families. He did not share Volusianus's status as a traditional keeper of the Empire, and he debates that Christianity is not only a good and beneficiary change to the Empire, it is in fact the logical next step for the greatest Empire in the world. In his response he seems to soften the edges of Christian

doctrine to better suit the roman aristocratic mind: Christianity is presented as a highly moral and logical philosophy, that will only improve the culture and bring a respectable and righteous life.

In between the two is Marcellinus. He was the same social class as Volusianus and also serving an office as tribune in Carthage during Volusianus's prefecture. They belong to the same circle and attended the same dinners. But Marcellinus was a Christian, and also writing to Augustine. Marcellinus's role in the correspondence is to write some additional questions that were left out from Volusianus's letter. He represents the new Christian aristocracy, culturally the same as Volusianus but with a new religion.

2. PART A: THE SOURCES AND THE CONTEXT OF THE PAGAN ARISTOCRACY OF THE 5TH CENTURY

2.1. The historical context

After the conversion of Emperor Constantine the Great Rome saw very few pagan Emperors, or even Emperors residing in the city. The imperial absence in the city began quite early on, from the turn of the third century the Emperor was not often in the city, and after the divide of power between the tetrarchic Emperors the courts were moving around the Empire, mainly to Trier, Milan, Thessalonike, Antioch and later of course Constantinople.[1] The traditional golden image of the Emperor Augustus, living in the heart of the world, attending her celebrations and offering sacrifices to her gods and the ancestors was now but a distant memory. Constantine was hardly ever in the city and was baptized on his deathbed, and his successors were mostly Christian. Constantine's new Christian monarchy was passed on to his competing relatives, and after his death in 337 the rule of the Empire was divided and eventually after the death of Constantine's sons Crispus, Constantine II and Constans had been killed, his third son Constantius II became Emperor and named his cousin Flavius Claudius Julian[2] as his co-Emperor. Julian was a pagan, although he had received a Christian upbringing. He had studied

[1] Mark Humphries: *Roman Senators and absent Emperors in Late Antiquity.* In Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historian pertinentia, vol. 17. Bardi Editore, Norwegian Institute in Rome, Rome, Italy. 2003, p.30.
[2] Julian reigned from 361 to 363. Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*. 2012, p. 330.

philosophy in Efesos and Athens, and he, according to the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, was the most civilized Emperor in over 150 years, comparable to Marcus Aurelius.[3] He wrote several texts for paganism and against Christianity. His writing shows that his own conversion from Christianity to paganism was an extremely powerful, and he was determined to restore pagan practice to the former glory it had enjoyed.[4]

He had, however, grown up on a Christian family, and the fact that he was not born to a pagan life shows in some of his religious views. He, after studying but not living the pagan religion, tried to reinstate sacrificial practices that had already disappeared from common practice. The example of the Church seems to have influenced him as well, as he tried to create almost a unified church of paganism, trying to infuse different old polytheistic cults together.[5] Paavo Castrén argues, that Julian´s Christian upbringing gave him a unique perspective on the traditional paganism he practiced. He believed in Helios, and that all the major gods were under his rule. He also tried to improve the image of paganism by reforming pagan ceremonies and by focusing on the moral of the pagan priesthood by forbidding priests and their sons to attend licentious performances and advising them to avoid immoral literature such as romantic or erotic literature. He was very adamant about returning traditional paganism to its original place as the core religion of the Empire, and even tried to reinstate practices and deities that had long been forgotten, including an attempt to bring back the cult of the Oracle of Delfoi. As for his regard for Christianity, it was not high. He acclaimed its popularity to the despair of the lower classes, and blamed the pagan priests for neglecting their poor and the Christians for luring them to their side [6] In 362 he also forbade Christians from teaching classical literature, because their denial of the pagan gods would make it impossible to teach the works they inspired. He referred to the Christians as Galileans, implying that they most certainly were not Roman, and wrote that Christianity was a lie inspired by evil.[7] He also reinstated the Altar of Victory to the Senate house after it had been removed by his predecessor Constantius II.[8]

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[3] Paavo Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia,* Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, Helsinki, Suomi. 2011, pp. 529-535.
[4] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*. 2011, p. 332.
[5] ibid. 2011, pp.332-334.
[6] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, pp. 533-536.
[7] Rowland Smith: Julian's God – Religion and philosophy in the thought and action of Julian the Apostate. Routledge, London, Great-Britain. 1995, pp.179-180.
[8] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, p. 532.

Julian died on the war campaign against Persia when he was only 31. He had not been popular among the Church, but even though he received the antagonistic nickname Apostate from Gregory of Nazianus and Hieronymos referred to him as a rapid dog, his statesmanship was appreciated. As Castrén writes, for the Christians Julian was "unfaithful to God but faithful to state."[9] After Julian the rule passed on to Jovianus, who died after only eight months in office. Flavius Valentinianus was named Emperor by the highest officers, and he named his brother Valens as the Augustus of the Eastern part of the Empire. Valentinianus moved his court to Trier and amplified the divide between the Eastern and the Western part by giving both the permission to independent legislation. Whereas Valentinianus was a talented Emperor and a soldier, his brother Valens was not, and was defeated by the Visigoths in 378. After Valens's death the title of the Eastern Augustus was given to Theodosius, also a baptized Christian. In the West the rule had been passed on to Valentianus's son, Flavius Gratian, who was also a Christian and under the influence of the bishop of Milan, Ambrose. From fervent abetment from Ambrose, Gratian removed once again the Altar of Victory from the Senate. He also suspended State funding for the traditional State cult and refused the title on *pontifex maximus. after* bishop Ambrose's influence in the synod of Rome in 382, thus abolishing the official state cult.[10] Gratian also cut the privileges of the Vestal Virgins in Rome, mainly removing the tax exemption that the college of virgins had had. Even though the college was able to function, the budget cuts were seen almost as an insult towards one of Rome's most revered traditions. The role of the Vestal Virgins was to pray to the gods to maintain Rome and her safety, and pagan Romans began to fear that Gratian's government was putting Rome in danger.[11]

Gratian's actions, along with the Eastern Emperor Theodosius's proclamation that made Christianity the official state religion in the year 381[12] sparked large opposition by the pagan elite, and some scholars have referred to the opposition as a movement called the pagan revival. Although these actions against

[9] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, p.536
[10] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, pp. 537-550.
[11] Peter Brown: Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA. 2012, pp.103-104.
[12] After the pagan usurper Eugenius had gathered some of Rome's most prominent senators behind him in 394, Theodosius wanted to make sure the senators would finally start converting in large numbers to the now newly official state religion and away from Eugenius and pagan revivalists like him. Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, p.6.

traditional paganism certainly caused an uproar among the pagan elite of late 4th century Rome, the idea of a large movement set out to bring paganism back is somewhat exaggerated as many scholars such as Alan Cameron and Michele Salzman have argued.[13] A large intellectual opposition did however occur, and we have ample literary evidence that the pagan elite were in a battle of convincing rather than forcing to preserve traditional state paganism. The most famous figure in this was senator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus[14]. He was a famous statesman, he was the proconsul of Africa in 373-375, city prefect of Rome (which was the highest office for a senator) in 384-385 and consul in 391. He was the ambassador of the Senate to the Emperor's court multiple times.[15] In 384 Symmachus travelled to the court of Valentinius II after writing his third *relatio.* It was a speech for the court of Milan, pleading with beautiful rhetoric for the Emperor to return the Altar of Victory to the Senate and for him to return state subsidies for the priests of the traditional paganism.[16] His talent in rhetoric was famous and his position revered, but the Christian influence was too strong, and with active counter arguments from bishop Ambrose Symmachus's plea was not granted. Ambrose was no easy opponent, he too was highly educated in the art of rhetoric, and he was a lawyer so his art of argumentation was excellent.[17] Ambrose wrote a rebuttal to Symmachus's Third Relatio, and expanded the issue by saying that the Altar was only the beginning to a larger plan to uproot traditional paganism from Rome once and for all. Ambrose's talent and his nigh threatening influence for the Emperor Valentinianus II (not even shying away from threatening the Emperor with excommunication if the Altar would be restored), gave rise to a new political opponent, the militant Christian bishop.[18]

Rome was not facing only religious instability, the long lasting power divide between multiple Emperors was coming to an endpoint. Emperor Gratian was killed in mysterious circumstances in 383, and his successor Valentinianus II eventually committed suicide in exile. Theodosius I was the Augustus of the Eastern part of the Empire, but after defeating Maximus and

[13] Rita Lizzi Testa, Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy: *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome.* Cambridge University Press, New York, USA. 2016, p.1.
[14] Quintus Aurelius Symmachus was born around the year 340 and died in 402. Karen Louise Jolly: *Tradition and Diversity: Christianity in a World Context to 1500*. Routledge, New York, USA. 1997, p.45.
[15] PRLRE 1
[16] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, pp. 544-545.
[17] Jolly, Karen Louise: *Tradition and Diversity*. 1997, p.45.
[18] Peter Brown: *Through the Eye of the Needle*. 2012, pp.104-105.

Eugenius, pagan usurpers that had tried to rise to power in Rome, Theodosius united the Empire under one ruler for the first time in decades. He continued on the path that Gratian and Valentinianus II had been following, and enforced new laws against traditional paganism. In 391 he forbade religious rites in public temples and in 392 he expanded the ban to private rites as well.[19]

Theodosius I ceremoniously gave the title of the Western Augustus to his eleven-year old son, Honorius[20], and he was placed under the guardianship of Theodosius's best military commander, Stilicho. Honorius set up his court in Ravenna, because Alaric the Visigoth was rapidly advancing with his troops and Ravenna was easier to defend than Milan. Stilicho managed to fend of the Visigoth troops in 403 and in 405, and kept the invasion from reaching central areas of the Empire. Stilicho was however accused of trying to squirm his way into power through the child Emperor Theodosius II, Honorius's brother, and Honorius had him and his family executed. With the East uninterested, Rome's legions neglected and left for, as Paavo Castrén wrote, in the hands of nostalgic men idealizing the eternal Rome instead of keeping it running, Rome had been vulnerable for a long time. Now that Stilicho was dead, there was no more obstacles for Alaric and his troops to march towards Rome.[21] Alaric was the leader of the Visigoths from around 395-410. He had served Rome under Theodosius I on a military campaign in 394 and he was made the *magister militum* of Illyria, but the next year he had raised a rebellion against the Empire. Alaric negotiated with Honorius's government vigorously to restore the agreements he had with Honorius regarding land that was owed to his people before the order to sack the city, but to no avail. The Visigoths attacked Rome, and many of the citizens, including the aristocracy, fled the city to safer provinces.[22] We cannot know for certain if Volusianus was among those who fled the city in 410, but by the time we meet him for the first time he is already working in North Africa in 412.

Even though Volusianus was thoroughly Roman both in birth and in culture, I will briefly discuss the North African context of this thesis. At the time of the

[19] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, p. 565.
[20] Honorius reigned from 395 to 423. Vincent J. O'Malley: Saints of Africa. Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, Indiana, USA. 2001. p. 57
[21] ibid. 2001, pp.565-568.
[22] Michael Kulikowski: *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric*. Cambridge University Press, New York, USA. 2006, p. 191; Castrén: : *Uusi Antiikin historia*. 2011, pp.565-568.

correspondence Volusianus was working and living in Carthage, and the situation in his new office must have affected some of the concerns he had in regards to Christianity. Also Augustine, from the somewhat defending Christian side of the correspondence, was born in North Africa and worked in Hippo in the time of the correspondence. I would argue that his need for political allies in the face of donatist rebels and religious dispute in North Africa at least partly affected his decision to reach out to Volusianus. In order to win the case for Christianity, the wise clergyman would seek to connect himself with influential members of the aristocracy in his area.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the Mediterranean was an inland sea inside the Roman Empire. The North African provinces were ruled by Roman consuls and prefects by appointment of the emperor. The provinces were virtually isolated from the rest of the African continent. Although North Africa was Roman and had quite little interaction with the rest of Africa, it was still very different from the capitol and Constantinople. Most of the population were Berber farmers, and among vast farmlands there were great cities, the most important one being Carthage. North Africa was in many ways safer than European parts of the empire, since it had less civil wars and less barbarian invasions. Rome was yet the ideal for the upper classes of North Africa, and the young men of upper class families were sent to Europe to receive a formal training, just as St Augustine was sent to Rome by his family. North African aristocrats were famous for their skills in the practice of law and poignant rhetoric. According to Peter Brown, the outstanding academic and rhetoric level of North African aristocrats is partly explained by the highly competitive element of the North African upper class. Most of the families were poorer and sometimes newer than old, respected Roman families, and the offspring of this new provincial elite had to double their efforts to claim their place among the intellectual elite of the empire. [23]

Most of the area's residents spoke indigenous languages, mainly Punic, but the upper classes like Augustine's family spoke Latin. North African Latin was quite distinct from the way language was used in the European parts of the Empire, it was filled with what Brown calls" verbal fireworks" and great attention to rhetorical details. The common stereotype of the time was that of the North

[23] Brown: *Augustine: Confessions, second edition*. Translated by F.J.Sheed, introduction by Peter Brown, edited by Michael P. Foley. Hackett Publishing Company, USA. 2006, pp. xix; Brown: *Augustine of Hippo: a biography*. University of California Press, London, Great-Britain. 2000, pp. 7-10.

African aristocrat as a verbally mischievous lawyer and a rhetorical master.[24] North Africa was thus an intellectually fruitful part of the empire. But during the course of the fourth century North Africa had none the less deteriorated because of economic downfalls due to civil wars on the continent and the inefficiency of the government after the imperial court moved to Constantinople but the senate stayed in Rome. The well-educated men of the area were moving in large groups to Rome and Constantinople to study and work. They were often however employed back to the provinces as officials of the government. The senate and the emperor were far and interfered rarely with the affairs of the North African provinces, and the state officials usually rose to fairly autonomous power in their provinces.[25]

North Africa had had a strong Christian representation from early on. Hippo was no exception, and the majority of the residents were Christian in the beginning of the fifth century. The imperial edicts against pagan rites had reduced the number of pagans in the area, and in 388-400 most of the temples were closed and images and statues of the gods were destroyed. Even though pagan temples were protected as historical artifacts, Christian mobs still occasionally tore down ancient places of worship. Augustine refers to this in one of his sermons, he was concerned that forcing paganism underground with legislation is not sensible and will not eradicate the practice.[26]

2.2. The religious context

Rome had expanded rapidly throughout her history and the religious field in the Empire was diverse. Christianity was in the process of replacing paganism in late antiquity Rome after being made the official faith of the Empire during the reign of Constantine the Great. Traditional paganism was however still very popular, especially among the aristocratic class. It is difficult to say what percentage of the elite was still pagan and who were Christians, as I will explain in more detail later in part B of this thesis, but it is apparent that both paganism and Christianity was

[24] Brown: *Confessions*. 2006, pp. xix; Brown: *Augustine of Hippo.* 2000, pp. 10-11.
[25] Brown: *Augustine of Hippo.* 2000, pp. 11-14.
[26] William Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate.* Liturgical Press, Minnesota, USA. 2014, pp. 135-136 ; Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*. 2011, p. 355.

practiced among the class. Late Antiquity paganism in Rome was a loosely built blend of ancestral cult, myth, philosophy and an enthusiasm for Roman history. It was a complex combination of tradition and new influences that had been added over the course of centuries as Rome expanded to new areas and the population became increasingly multicultural.[27]

The use of the term itself, "pagan", in a religious context comes from Christian authors, and in the Christian texts of the time it simply means those who are not Christians, including the Jews. All other religions were put under the same term. Before Christian influence in western Rome the Latin term *paganus* meant uneducated, uncivilized peasants.[28] *Paganus* is based on the word *pagus*, which meant a rural area. The common use of the word in texts from Rome's early years however referred to civilians in contrast to soldiers.[29] In the eastern part of the empire the term *Hellenes* was used for pagans. In the west, it seems, the term had more negative associations than in the east. *Paganus* refers to outsiders and less educated or respected people, when *Hellenes* seems to have referred mostly to people's cultural background, they were people who practiced the old Greco-Roman religion instead of Christianity. The other term Christian writers used to describe non-Christians was the Latin term *gentiles* or in Greek *ethne* and *ethnikoi*. The term gentiles meant simply nations or peoples and was more neutral. Still, it had the association of being "the other", an outsider.[30] According to Alan Cameron it would however be unlikely that in the western part of the Empire non-Christians would be referred to by a term signifying a lack of civilization when in the east they would be called by a name that signifies the most revered civilized culture known to the Christian writers. Cameron concludes from this that the term *paganus* was not used in the old, rural sense when talking about non-Christians, but that the term had changed over time.[31] In this study I will use the term pagan to refer to those romans who practiced traditional Greco-Roman religion instead of Christianity in the fourth and fifth century.

Historically ancient Roman economy was largely based on agriculture and warfare, so most of the early gods and worship rituals revolved around these two themes. Eventually as Rome grew the gods of commerce and crafts gained

[27] Michael Grant: *From Rome to Byzantium: the fifth century A.D*. Routledge, USA. 1998, p. 67.
[28] Marja-Leena Hänninen, Maijastiina Kahlos, Ulla Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa* Bookwell OY, Juva,Finland. 2012, p. 346
[29] Alan Cameron: *The last pagans of Rome,* Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2012, p.14.
[30] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, pp. 347.
[31] Cameron: *The last pagans of Rome*. 2010, pp. 14-15.

popularity. Roman paganism borrowed elements from the cultures it conquered, and its polytheistic pantheon from the Greeks. Religion in the growing republican Rome[32] served a more communal purpose than the individualistic cults that emerged in the more luxurious imperial times[33]. Worship was traditionally a means of securing the gods' protection over the community. Religion was a civic duty, and thus the emphasis was on life on earth and the continuity of Rome instead of personal happiness in the afterlife.[34] Religion was a national cause of pride as well; a true roman followed the religion of his ancestors. Cicero wrote that romans were superior in their understanding of divinity and thus above other nations in the eyes of the gods[35] The Romans saw themselves as highly religious, and believed that their piety and worship practices were the reason Rome had grown into such a great Empire. The might of Rome was seen to be based on this *pax deorum*, peace of the gods.[36]

Religion was thus a critical part of political life. In a sense it was seen as a part of the empire's defense system. The Roman Empire and its safety was *res publica*, a common cause.[37] Since in roman culture religion and politics were intertwined, senators held important religious positions as well. Most of the members of the *clarissimi* were priests in different state temples and cults. In fact, in order for the senator to make a good name for himself, he had to be a discernible supporter of state cults.[38] Actively participating in pagan rituals served two purposes for the senator: it allowed the senator to show his piety and honor to the people and his peers in public ceremonies, and in the family context it supported the status of the patriarch.[39] After the accession of Emperor Augustus in 27 B.C., the emperor himself was *pontifex maximus*, the highest of state priests.[40]

This tradition lasted until the year 383, when Emperor Gratian refused to accept the title. This meant that the Emperor withdrew government funding of

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[32] The Roman republican era is dated around 500 B.C. to 27 B.C., ending in Emperor Augustus. Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, p.13,

[33] The Roman imperial era is dated from 27 B.C. to 436 AD, ending the reign of the last Western Roman Emperor Romulus Augustulus. Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, p. 17.

[35] Kwame Bediako: T*heology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and in modern day Africa*, Regnum Books, Great Britain. 1999, pp. 21-25.

[36]Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, pp. 15-16.

[37] ibid. 2012, p.17.

[38] Michele R. Salzman: *The Making of Christian Aristocracy: Social and religious change in the Western Roman Empire.* Harvard University Press, USA. 2002, pp. 2-3.

[39] ibid. 2002, p. 20.

[40] Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price: *Religions of Rome: Volume 1: a history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Great Britain. 1998, p. 188.

traditional state cults, and it sent a clear message to the nation; old state cults were no longer part of the new Christian Empire.[41] Emperors had often enough before tried out new religions, but they had rarely stressed their religion on state politics. These new Christian emperors however took affirmative action to ground Christianity to the Roman world, beginning with Emperor Constantine the Great and the edict of Milan in the year 313, which gave legitimacy to Christianity in the Empire. The edict did not place Christianity in any higher position than other religions, insuring religious freedom for all. According to Alanna Speer, the significance of the edict was in demonstrating the state's shift in attitude towards Christianity, moving from mild toleration to benevolence. [42] Constantine further showed his interest and care for Christianity by arranging and attending the council of Nicea to determine which denomination, the Arians[43] of the Catholics[44], had the right doctrine on the nature of Christ. Now the Emperor was not only a supporter of a new, un-Roman religions, but also an active mediator between what to the traditionalist Roman aristocrat was a foreign, relatively new religion and the traditional religion of his ancestors. As the fervor of pious Emperors grew, Christianity was made not only a religion as good as the rest of them, but as the only official religion of the state in 380, when during the rule of emperors Valetinian II, Gratian and Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica, naming all but followers of the Nicene Christianity as heretics. [45] The Empire was now forced Christian, and any hope of returning to the practice of the old religion must have seemed most unlikely.

The Emperor was no longer pontifex maximus, and the institutions build to worship Rome's gods were not supported, but left for their own devices. This stirred anxiety among the aristocratic class, and the notion of *pax deorum* as Rome's insurance against catastrophe was confirmed for many in the sack of Rome in 410. Rome had the protection of the gods as long as they upheld proper

[41] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*. 2012, p. 343.
[42] Alanna Speer: *How did Christianity become the Dominant Religion of the Later Roman Empire.* History in the Making, vol.3, no. 2. 2014. ISSN: 2200-4777.
[43] Inspired by the teachings of Areios (c. 250-336), the Arians believed in the absolute oneness of God, stating that the Father had created the Son, and thus they were not of the same nature and being, but separate, and Christ the human was not divine. After the council of Nicea the Arians were pronounced heretics in 381. Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot Antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, pp. 335-338.
[44] The Catholics were the winners of the council of Nicea, stating that the Father and the Son were in fact of the same nature and being (homoousios), but two different persons in the same unity. Ibid. 2012, p.335.
[45] Speer*: How did Christianity become…* 2014.

worship.[46] This had been diminished after the emperor and court had turned to Christianity and traditional worship had mostly stopped after the year 395, when polytheistic cults and public worship were forbidden.[47] The common notion among many, especially among the pagan elite, was that the Visigoths of Alaric would not have been able to invade Rome if the gods hadn't withdrawn their support.[48]

Despite the aristocracy's distrust of the new faith and some of the less considerate Christian emperors, and the view of a good senator being a pagan senator, the conversion of Emperor Constantine added pressure for the senatorial class to make large compromises religiously in order to stay in the favor of the court. Also the Emperor had to make compromises to keep the loyalty of the senate, so the Imperial court could not enforce Christianity on the senatorial class too boldly. Christianity began to be marketed as a continuum of patriotic, stoic ideals of comradery, the strong role of the patriarch and the up keeping of old virtues such as diligence, honesty and living a humble lifestyle.[49] The conversion of the senatorial class happened very gradually over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries. This gradual shift made it possible for the old pagan past and the new Christian faith to interface with each other, and many of the secular and pagan elements transcended to Christianity. The old pagan cult was very tightly ingrained in society and in all aspects of life. For example, much of the literature read by the elite was from the old pagan past, texts especially from Virgil and Livy were the mark of a civilized man. Also most of the state festivities and national holidays remained very pagan in the festival processions and rituals.[50]

We can see the same phenomenon in the case of the Codex-Calendar of 354, which I will discuss quite briefly as mere background information since it was made a good 60 years before our main topic. Michele Salzman noted when discussing the Codex-Calendar of 354, being a Christian in late antiquity Rome did not mean that the pagan past and its traditions were not important and still a part of daily life. The calendar is important because it places both pagan and Christian celebrations in the same calendar. It was made for a Christian aristocrat called Valentinus by Furius Dionysius Filocalus, who was also commissioned at

[46] Grant: *From Rome to Byzantium.* 1998, pp. 17-18.
[47] Hänninen, Kahlo, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, p. 352.
[48] Castrén: *Uusi antiikin käsikirja*. 2011, p. 559.
[49] Salzman: *The Making of Christian Aristocracy*. 2002, pp. 4-9.
[50] Charles W. Hedrick Jr.: *History and silence: Purge and rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity.* University of Texas Press, Texas, USA. 2000, pp.57–58.

some time by pope Damascus.[51] Both pagan and Christian festivals are marked in the calendar, even those pagan festivals that were no longer actively practiced. The calendar also makes interesting analogies between a pagan past and a Christian present, the list of Roman consuls is accompanied by a list of popes, and traditional Roman festivals are accompanied by the days of the martyrs. According to Ján Elsner, this was a conscious effort to create a Christian identity for a city whose only Christian roots were the martyrdoms of St. Peter and St. Paul.[52] The calendar might very well have been a tool for Christian propaganda as well, but since it was a private calendar ordered by an already Christian aristocrat, I am inclined to agree with Michele Salzman on the view that the calendar simply shows us, without conscious intention, the state of assimilation and a mixed culture in which it's commissioner lived in. Even though roman aristocrats had begun converting to Christianity in ever growing numbers after Constantine the Great, their cultural roots were in a pagan Rome, that still showed its paganism in monthly festivals. In the mid-fourth century a large part of the roman aristocracy was still pagan, and there was no great conflict for a Christian to belong in both worlds, nor any great interest from the government to inforce the Emperor's faith on the people of Rome.[53]

2.3. The philosophical context

Despite the lack of large scale pressure to replace paganism with Christianity and the popularity of pagan rites, the Emperor's religion was growing rapidly. Christianity was so successful in part because of a wider trend of movement towards monotheism in the empire in late Antiquity. In the imperial era an idea called philosophical monotheism had become a common way intellectuals explained the nature of the highest divinity. It was based on the notion that all schools of philosophical thought and all religions ultimately pointed to the same universal truth.[54] During the days of fast Roman expansion in the imperial era the empire had become more pluralistic; people were exposed to a great multitude of

[51] Robert Hannah: *Greek and Roman Calendars – Construction of time in the Classical World.* Duckworth, Great-Britain. 2005, p. 139.
[52] Ján Elsner: *Inventing Christian Rome: the role of early Christian art*. In *Rome the Cosmopolis* (ed. Catherine Edwards & Greg Woolf), Cambridge University Press, New York USA. 2003, pp. 72-80
[53] Michele Salzman: *Structuring Time*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome* (ed. Paul Erdkarp), Cambridge University Press, New York USA. 2013, p 495
[54]Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, p. 37.

worldviews and religions. People had much more variety to choose from, and religion became more individualistic.[55] The image of God changed as well, God became benevolent, merciful and kind. The personality of the supreme God became less important in mythological narratives and people began to look for universal traits in different descriptions of God. The era was characterized by syncretism, a practice aimed at combining the elements all worldviews shared about the divine. The aim was to find one universal truth to explain existence.[56]

The idea of syncretism reached Christian writers as well. Theologians began adapting the old concepts of classical philosophy with Christian doctrine. Augustine wrote in *Confessions* that God had revealed himself in Platonist texts. He was a good example of how Church fathers used Platonism, especially Neoplatonism to justify Christian teachings.[57] Platonism was the major philosophical school of late antiquity, and by the time of our correspondence it had developed into Neoplatonism. Because of Plato's view on a supreme, high deity and the benevolence of this supreme deity it was a logical reference point to Christianity as a philosophical school.[58]

The philosophical scene of late antiquity had seen the emerging of classically trained, skilled clergymen that were on a mission to make Christianity compelling and intellectually tempting. Augustine also adapted traditional legends in his quest to make Christianity the philosophical heir of the classical world and thus the next step in civilized human history. Paul Joseph LaChance wrote that Augustine was an example of a Roman high class Christian in the sense that he was trying to fit together his classical training and the intellectual standards of classical philosophical thought with his faith and priesthood. This fusion of old wisdom and new faith was the key factor in making the *Confessions* such a success in its time and to this day. Augustine in a way fused the thoughts of St. Paul and the pagan writer Virgil. Virgil was one of the most important writers in pagan Roman philosophy and history. In Virgil's Aeneid the hero Aeaneas travels from Troy to Hades and again back on earth to participate in the founding of Rome. Augustine made and allegory between Aeaneas's journey and a Christians journey of the soul. In Augustine's version Aeneas is replaced by the soul of a

[55]ibid. 2012, p. 19.
[56]ibid. 2012, p. 309.
[57] Dominic J. O'Meara: *Neoplatonism and Christian thought*, State University of New York Press, New York, USA. 1986, pp. ix-x.
[58] Drobner: *Christian philosophy* in the Oxford Handbook of early Christian studies. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2008, pp. 55-60.

wandering Christian, Troy represents pagan times, Hades is the purgatory and cleansing of the soul of pagan past into the new Rome, the Church.[59] Augustine here makes Christianity the philosophical and intellectual heir to the wisdom of Rome in a time when Christianity was still slowly but surely emerging to the Roman aristocratic scene. In books seven and eight of the Confessions we see this difference clearly, book seven describes Augustine's intellectual conversion and only in book eight his moral conversion.[60] Augustine thus through himself claims that Christianity can indeed be also an intellectual choice, not just a spiritual one. He uses his classical training in other works as well, for example in the City of God he refers to the writings of Cicero 18 times.[61]

Philosophically Augustine took a Neoplatonist view of Christianity. Here Augustine used the allegorical practices learned from Ambrose to make links between Christian doctrine and Neoplatonist conceptions about the nature of human life. He was influenced by writers like Plotinus and Porphyry, whose works he studied during his time in Milan. Augustine came to the conclusion that Christianity was the way to receive intellectual and philosophical happiness. To Augustine, ancient wisdom found in the great philosophers was simply a part of the journey of mankind toward a union with God. They were merely human, and could not receive this unity before Christ and his ultimate sacrifice.[62]

The Confessions is also an interesting view on 4th century Roman Christianity and the way Christianity had begun to move up in the social rank. Christianity had struggled since it's adaptation from a lack of credibility as a philosophical, intellectual choice. Even in the time of St. Paul we can see that the classically trained intellectuals of the day were more than willing to discuss the lofty ideas of God's oneness and supremacy, but when Paul started preaching about the resurrection of the dead the intellectuals lost interest and Christianity was pocketed back to the silly foreign superstition it was seen as[63] The commonly accepted Christian doctrines however were the idea of Logos and the high

[59] Paul Joseph LaChance: *A Christian Aeneid: Pagan and Christian education in the Confessions.* In Augustine and World Religions, edited by Peter Brown and John A. Doody. Lexington Books, USA. 2008, pp. 71-73.
[60] Alan D. Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, USA. 1999, p. 230.
[61] John M. Mattox: *St. Augustine and the Theory of Just War.* Continuum Books, New York, USA. 2006, p. 14.
[62] Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the Ages*. 1999, p. 230.
[63] Acts 17: 32, translation:" Some mocked Paul, when they heard him talking about the resurrection, but others said: We will hear you again about this?" The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Bible, 1992 translation.

personal morals it professed. The divinity of Christ and especially his resurrection was a tougher bite to chew for pagan philosophers, and many thought that Christ was a healer, a magician and a preacher with good morals but whose followers had simply lost their minds and quickly invented a religion on his teachings. However, since these concepts could not be removed from the faith but the Church certainly did not want to label itself as a silly superstition, they had to be made more reasonable philosophically, leading to a battle of apologetic rhetoric and new, unbiblical terms such as *homoousios* to explain Christ's divinity.[64]

Christianity was still slowly but surely emerging to the Roman intellectual scene, but had still failed to impress all of the highly educated aristocracy. Neoplatonist ideas like the immortality of the soul and the idea of a supreme deity were easy to adapt however, and easy to use as proof that Christianity was a logical descendant of Platonism. Whereas the Church had no problem with this, many members of the pagan elite whose philosophical home was Neoplatonism, saw far too many differences in the two to justify them being linked. Especially the idea that the supreme God would come down to Earth and take up the weak form of a human was uncomprehendable and even blasphemous. God's or divinity's purpose after all was to be transcendent, eternal and all mighty.[65] The same thing also bothered Volusianus and the symposium he was attending, as we see in letter 135 from Volusianus to Augustine. Volusianus conveys an un-named attendant's bafflement over whether God in his greatness would occupy the weak form of the infant Christ.[66]

The pagan elite had another reason for concern when it came to Christianity. Since according to Neoplatonism, all worldviews were an interpretation of one universal truth, there was no need for religious persecution. Rome had traditionally had freedom of religion, at least partially on the condition that the Emperor and the Empire were honored with sacrifices and proper taxes. Beyond that, all faiths were allowed as long as they were in the boundaries of the law and posed no threat to the empire.[67] However, after such clear religious statements from the new Christian rule of the Empire such as the official end of state funding

[64] Hubertus R. Drobner: *Christian philosophy* in the Oxford Handbook of early Christian studies. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2008, pp. 678-680.
[65] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa. 2012, p. 316.
[66]Ep. 135 in *Letters 100-155, Part 2, Volume 2*. ed. Rotelle, John E; Ramsey, Boniface, Augustinian Heritage Institute. New York: New City Press. 2003.
[67]Karel Blei: *Freedom of religion and belief: Europe's story*, Assen, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum BV. 2002, pp. 17-18.

for pagan rites and Emperor Gratian's refusal to accept the title of pontifex maximus[68], followed by several Imperial edicts such as the previously discussed Edict of Thessalonica in 380 against the practice of paganism and the institutionalization of the Church, many persecution movements broke out against pagans in the empire, for example the destruction of pagan temples in Carthage in that Augustine talks about in one of his sermons, saying that pushing the pagans underground with persecution is not wise, and will only result in opposition.[69]

In an attempt to unify the Empire's various religious groups, several laws were passed to allow the arrest of heretics and pagans and to deny public displays of pagan worship. These laws were easy to pass, since the emperor was Christian and the Church had an influence especially in the court but also in the Senate.[70] Bishops such as Augustine used their influence to affect religious policies. We have many surviving sources to show Augustine's active involvement in state politics. For example, Augustine writes in letter 133 Augustine writes to Marcellinus, giving him advice on what would be the right treatment of captured Donatist rebels.[71] In another occasion Augustine wrote to the Stuart of the African province Macedonius to employ him to make sure the Christian God was being worshipped and no other.[72] The growing influence of a completely new instrument of power such as the Church, an institution that was unfamiliar and not connected to the Senate, must have been evident and somewhat unsettling for some of the members of the old pagan elite.

2.4. The cultural context

Apart from the emperor, at the top of the social hierarchy was the governing elite, the senators. This was the social context of Volusianus and Marcellinus as well. The aristocratic senatorial class was known as the *clarissimi*, they were a large group of officials and nobility with a lot of influence in social, economic, politic and cultural affairs, including holding priesthoods in state cults. Even in late antiquity Rome, when the Emperor and his court were in Constantinople, the

[68] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin käsikirja.* 2012, p. 540.
[69] Harmless: *Augustine*. 2014, pp. 135-136.
[70]Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, pp. 350-353.
[71]Ep. 133
[72]Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa.* 2012, p. 353.

Senate remained as an important and revered institute with varying degrees of power. Even with the absence of an imperial power in the city of Rome from the end of the fourth century onwards[73], the Senate, according to Mark Humphries saw themselves still as a vital part of the government, and with good reason. The city of Rome, despite not being the imperial capital, maintained its position as the heart of the Empire and of the civilized world, and its Senate and its members "*an embodiment of all that was venerable about Rome*".[74] Even though from the fifth century onwards Constantine had created another Senate in Constantinople and the rank of senator became open to newer and less traditional families, including the raise of provincial powers in the vast, now less centralized Empire expanded the influence of people, as Humphries put it, that the Roman senators would traditionally not see as their peers,[75] Volusianus came from the old elite of Rome, and I will be focusing on the traditional senatorial families.

The class of senators had a long history, and most of them came from old aristocratic families, since the office was only available if the candidate had sufficient wealth and had a good reputation among his peers. The senators shared a common idea of the right kind of status and behavior befitting an aristocrat. A member of the *clarissimi* was largely dominated by a strong status culture, a shared set of values and proper behavior that all respectable members of the same class were to follow both in public and in personal life. A proper Roman senator was supposed to live honoring principal virtues befitting a Roman. The most important part was *pietas*, acceptance of the god's will and respect for them, their cults and above all, the Roman ancestors. The example of proper *pietas* was the legend of Aeneas, who had to leave Troy, leaving his true love and following the god´s will and bringing his people to Rome despite his personal feelings. Other values were *fides*, (justice and trust between citizens and the state), *virtus*, (patriotism and courage), *honos*, (a sense of honor), *liberalitas* (generosity), *gravitas* (proper action and speech befitting one´s class) and *humanitas* (knowledge in culture and history).[76] A senator's social status was defined by how he kept to these values and how his peers viewed him. This also extended to the senator's family.[77] The civic morality of these Romans was linked to the idea of

[73]Emperor Arcadius moved the court out of the city permanently and into Constantinople. Humphries: *Roman Senators and absent Emperors.* 2003, p. 31.
[74] ibid. 2003, p. 31.
[75] ibid. 2003, p. 33.
[76] Castrén: *Uusi antiikin käsikirja*. 2012, pp. 312-313.
[77] Salzman: *The Making of Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, pp. 4-5.

mos maiorum, the traditions of the ancestors that were passed down through the generations. This was however not just sentimental nostalgia, Roman intellectuals like Cicero were convinced that the glory of Rome was created by the ancestors, and could only continue by following in their footsteps. The aristocracy had a mythical perception of the ancestors of their own family, and focusing on *mos maiorum* in intellectual life was also a way of showing the family's importance and their place as the continuers of Roman glory.[78]

Being a member of a rich and old Roman patristic family suggests that Volusianus was highly educated in the classical Roman style. Roman education was based on Greek education, which begun during the archaic period in 8th to 6th centuries BC.[79] The Greek model was based on first studying at home and then at six years old the children started formal schooling, which consisted of physical exercise and the basics of civilization, science, philosophy and arts. After the basis the children moved on to secondary school, which also included military training. The old schools of Athens still held a remarkable position in the cultural memory of the era, and schools such as Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum were idealized. Philosophy in general was seen as the source of all sciences, and cultured Romans were well read in the major schools of thought. Classical education also held a high respect towards teachers, going back to the idea of the travelling and lecturing sophist in Greece.[80] Volusianus shows the same respect towards Augustine, who was not only a respected Bishop but also highly educated and a teacher of rhetoric before he was appointed Bishop of Hippo. In letter 135 Volusianus refers to Augustine's reputation as a great rhetoric and his elevated position as a teacher[81] and shows the appropriate level of respect towards the esteemed Bishop, asking for his teaching regardless of him no longer being in the position of a student.[82] Rhetoric, the art of public speech, was the corner stone of Roman education, and it was essential to getting a high level public office. It was the final stage of the student's education, and it required the teaching of the rector, one such as Augustine had been before his ordination. Rhetoric was taught in the

[78] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: Uskonnot Antiikin Roomassa. 2012, pp. 29-32.
[79] Yun Lee Too, *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Koninklijke Boekhandel en Drukkerij, Brill, The Netherlands. 2001, p. 263.
[80] Kenneth O. Gangel, Warren S. Benson, *Christian education: It's History and Philosophy,* Wipf and stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, USA. 2002, pp. 33-36.
[81] Ep. 135, 1. Full citation: *"I speak to one familiar with the subject, for you were not long ago a teacher of these things. --- Others extolled with partiality the poet's art. This part also of eloquence is not left unnoticed or un-honored by you."*
[82] Ep. 135, 1. Full citation: *"---and willingly offer myself to be taught by you, acknowledging the authority of the ancient proverb, we are never too old to learn."*

equivalent level of modern university education.[83] Although this was a talent bishop Augustine indeed possessed, the general education level of the Christian bishops was not always as high, and some bishops were so uneducated that they did not even know how to write their name in the council of Ephesus, or came from Bible schools where the holy texts were emphasized but classical education was ignored.[84]

The symposium, the same type of gathering Volusianus and Marcellinus attended, became the forum in which learned members of the elite exchanged and discussed philosophy, rhetoric and sciences.[85] It was usually a dinner for a group of aristocrats in which the values and norms of the Roman elite were discussed, remembered and continued. It had a strict code of conduct, and it was, as Simon Goldhill writes, "a performance of a citizen's cultural identity".[86] The nostalgic aristocracy of the late Antique era continued to extol the Roman virtues of the old republic among each other in these meetings. *Mos maiorum* was practiced by the aristocracy in public or personal life, and thus also in symposiums. Writing about symposiums and the dialogues held in them became a popular literary genre called sympotic literature, for example the *Saturnalia* by Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, that I will discuss later in this thesis. In Rome, however, the concept of the symposium changed slightly from that of the Greek version. Rome was more pluralistic due to its many periods of conquest and expansion, and in Roman symposiums the conversation often revolved around how to perceive Roman worldviews in relation to their origins in Greek civilization and new faiths in the Empire, such as Christianity.[87] Such was the case with the symposium of Volusianus, Marcellinus and their group of friends.

The senatorial class was not only the intellectual elite of late antiquity Rome, but an important financial part of the Empire as well. The old families held substantial property and land throughout the Empire, and had a lot to say in the running of their financial interests. In their senatorial position their influence

[83] Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds,* Cambridge Classical Studies, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, Great Britain. 1998, pp. 190-193.
[84] Hubertus R. Drobner: *Christian philosophy* in the Oxford Handbook of early Christian studies. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2008, p. 679
[85]ibid. 2008, pp. 263-264.
[86] Simon Goldhill: *The end of dialogue in Antiquity.* Cambridge University Press, New York, USA. 2008, pp. 3-5.
[87] ibid. 2008, pp. 4-5.

extended mostly to the city of Rome, but the *cursus honorum*[88] of the late antiquity senator seldom kept them only in the city.[89] For example, at the time of the correspondence, Volusianus was working in Carthage where his family also held land.

2.5. Sources

As my primary source I will use St. Augustine's letters 132-137 that contain the correspondence between the bishop and the Roman aristocrats, Volusianus and Marcellinus. As additional sources I will use Augustine's De Cathehizandis Rudibus, Augustine's teaching on how to catechize new Christians. From this I shall focus on the parts where Augustine writes about catechizing the aristocracy. From the pagan side of the argument I will use *Saturnalia* by Macrobius, a story of a symposium between important intellectuals who are discussing Rome and her relationship with ancient customs. Even though Macrobius is supposed to have been a Christian, the text has its focus on the pagan tradition, and Charles Hedrick wrote, it is one of the most vital sources we have on the aristocratic elite of Rome in late antiquity.[90] When researching the cultural and political background of the opposition of the pagan aristocrats, I will utilize the *Third Relatio* of senator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, where the famous senator pleads the Emperor to allow the pagan Altar of Victory to be returned to the senate. *Saturnalia* was written around the 430's, about twenty years after our main source, and the *Third Relatio* was written decades before the actual correspondence. Even though they are not exact contemporaries to our main source, they still give us important insight into how the Roman aristocracy saw their culture and the loss of tradition in the face of a new faith. Volusianus himself did not write such texts or commented on the state of religious change in the Empire besides the letter 134 he wrote to Augustine, but his social context and background was very similar to that of Macrobius, Symmachus and the other pagan senators Macrobius writes about,

[88] *Cursus honorum* was a list of all the public offices and ranks the aristocrat had held during his life. This dates back to the Roman rebublican era in 400-200 B.C., and the cursus was initially a list of obligatory ranks that the senator needed to go through during his career. The senator served only a short time in each office before moving on to the next one, thus ensuring that senators gained important experience in all fields of civil government and also that one aristocrat could not dictate the affairs of his office indefinitely and without political responsibility, since all of the offices in the cursus demanded public elections. Castrén*: Uusi Antiikin Historia*. 2011, pp. 265-269.

[89] Humphries: *Roman senators and absent Emperors*. 2003, pp.33-34.

[90] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, p. 7.

so I will use these texts as an aid to help understand the views Volusianus has on the subject.

2.6. Letters between St Augustine, Volusianus and Marcellinus

In addition to the insight we get about the concerns of members from the pagan aristocracy, the correspondence between Augustine and senator Volusianus gives us a prime example of the new situation Christianity was facing in the beginning of the fifth century. It had already established itself as the growing state religion, but it still needed to impress the educated elite of the Empire. We see through Volusianus's questions the main concerns the elite had with Christianity. Some of these concerns are apparent in letter 134 from Volusianus to Augustine, and in letter 136 from Marcellinus to Augustine, both to which Augustine answers in length in letter 137 and in addition in letter 138, and explains and justifies Christian doctrine. These letters were written around the years 411 and 412, just months or at most two years after the sack of Rome.[91] Augustine started writing the De Civitate Dei, the City of God, in 413, the close timeframe of the correspondence. In the book Augustine explains how it was illogical to accuse Christianity for the sack of Rome as previously discussed, because Rome had seen invasions and attacks even before Christianity.[92] Augustine's need to absolve Christianity from fault and defending his religion to the ruling elite of his province would suggest that the sentiment was felt quite widely among the pagan aristocracy, even though not militantly expressed. The same accusation had inspired Orosius to write his History against the Pagans in 417, where he argued that since Rome had been attacked in pagan times even more viciously, the fault could not be in the new faith. He also claimed that the Visigoths had overlooked most of the Christian homes (which to me seems very unlikely in the midst of a ferocious siege) and had respected Christian shrines, signaling that the Christian God was protecting His own and the pagans were simply suffering the results of their ungodliness. Though exaggeration, this shows that the debate was intense and the cause of the attack was seen to be religious on both sides, forcing the

[91] Ramsay Boniface: *Saint Augustine: Selected writings on Grace and Pelagionism.* Edited by Roland Teske. Augustinian Heritage Institure, New City Press, New York, USA. 2011, p. 208.
[92] Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the Ages.* 1999, pp. 305-306.

Christian intellectuals to plead their case against pagan accusations.[93] Especially letter 137 from Augustine to Volusianus gives us an important view on how the new class of well-educated high-level Christians, such as Augustine was, justified Christianity and how they saw their faith in relation to the Greco-Roman classical culture.

The most important letter in this thesis is letter 134 from Volusianus to Augustine, since he was the only member of the correspondence who was pagan, and our focus is on the elite pagan response to Christianity. Along with letter 134 letter 136 is also significant, even though the writer, Marcellinus, was on the Christian camp. But since Marcellinus is forwarding Volusianus's additional questions raised in the symposium that were not in letter 134, it is also significant.

The letters relevant to this thesis, letters 132-137 were written around the years 411 and 412.[94] Augustine's letter writing was most active when he was around 70 years of age and working as the bishop of Hippo. At this time Augustine had already written his autobiographical conversion narrative, *The Confessions*, which had become a big literary hit.[95] Letter writing was crucial for the bishop of a distant and remote diocese, and he was actively writing to Emperor Honorius in Ravenna and to multiple high level aristocrats in positions of power to influence the matters of the North African province and the state of the Catholic Church in the Empire.[96] Augustine started writing *The City of God* in the year 413, a year after his correspondence with Volusianus.[97] The questions and doubts the aristocratic class had with Christianity that are raised in the correspondence no doubt inspired Augustine to defend Christianity and its place as the new state religion. Many members of the aristocratic class wrote to Augustine about problems they had with Christian doctrine and Christian way of life, or to ask spiritual advice from the famous bishop. Some of Augustine's letters are so comprehensive and long that they have even been called books. Augustine himself writes, that he was planning to compile his doctrinal teachings from his letters and sermons into one concise book. He made some progress on this with his book *Retractiones*, but unfortunately Augustine died before he could finish

[93] Bryan Ward-Perkins: *The Fall of Rome and the end of Civilization.* Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2005, p. 28.
[94]Rotelle, Ramsey: *Letters 100-155.* 2003, p. 208.
[95]Brown: *Augustine: Confessions*. 2006, p. xvii.
[96] Brown: *Augustine of Hippo.* 2000, pp. 289-291.
[97]Peter Brown: *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine,* Wipf and Stock Publishers, Oregon USA. 2007, p. 25.

this project. We have in total 249 letters that we know of from Augustine to others and 49 letters written to him.[98]

The first letter in the correspondence relevant to this study is the letter 132. In this letter Augustine writes to Volusianus on the request of Volusianus's mother and apparently after Volusianus has sent salutations to Augustine.[99] When Volusianus had been appointed as proconsul in North Africa around the years 411 and 412, his mother had apparently written to her Christian friends in the area and asked them to befriend her brother in order for him to get closer to Christianity. Among these friends was also the proconsul Marcellinus. Apparently Volusianus had asked too difficult questions from his new friends regarding Christianity, so they encouraged him to write with Augustine about these difficult points.[100]

In letter 132 Augustine, who apparently knows Volusianus's mother in some way[101], writes to Volusianus and urges him to ask the Bishop anything in regard to Christianity and encourages him to acquaint himself with Christian holy scriptures and the prophets so that the teachings of the apostles might become more clear.[102] Letter 133 and 138 are from Augustine to Flavius Marcellinus, a Roman aristocrat and tribune in North Africa who was Augustine's and Volusianus's mutual friend. He serves as the middle man between the pagan senator and the Bishop, and as Peter Brown states, an example of the new social class of the Christian aristocrat, born and bred in classical Roman culture but a pious Catholic who showed great interest in theology and was actively in correspondence with his closest clerical elite, Bishop Augustine.[103] In letter 132 Augustine asks Marcellinus to show mercy to the donatist rebels in his area.[104] This letter is not directly relevant to Augustine's and Volusianus's conversation so it will not be examined more thoroughly in this study, although I will return to it briefly at the end of this thesis when I discuss the problem of intra-Christian religious violence in the North African province around Volusianus's time in

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[98] Fitzgerald, *Augustine.* 1999, pp.305-306.
[99] Augustine writes: "*With regard to Your well-being, which I desire both in this world and in Christ, I perhaps even myself am not surpassed by the prayers of your mother."* Ep. 132.
[100] Kreider: *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Oregon, USA. 2007, pp. 65-66.
[101] Augustine refers to Volusianus's mother and writes *"sanctae matris tuae votis sum fortasse etiam ipse non impar."* Ramsay translated this *"I perhaps even myself am not surpassed by the prayers of your mother."* This could indicate that Volusianus's mother was a Christian (*sanctae matris tuae)* or at least knew Augustine before his correspondence with Volusianus. Ep. 132. Kreider: *The Change of Conversion*. 2006, pp. 65-66.
[102] Ep. 132
[103] Brown: *Augustine of Hippo*. 2000, p. 290.
[104] Ep. 133, 1.

office in the region, since I believe it an underlying factor in some of his concerns about the compatibility of Christianity and state politics. Marcellinus presided over the conference of Carthage in 411 regarding the issues and conflicts between the Catholics and the Donatists in the area. Previously the law for religious unity had denied re-baptism, an important element to the Donastists, and in 410 the Emperor issues a statement proclaiming Donatism as a growingly heretical movement. After the sack of Rome however Emperor Honorius wanted to ensure grain supply to the rest of the Empire from North Africa, and in order to maintain a steady society and thus a reliable food supply, he issued new laws on religious tolerance in the area. But unfortunately the rift had run too deep, and the Catholic side tried to revoke the law and maintained their view of Donatists as heretics. Marcellinus was accused to have been bias to the Catholic side, and was soon after executed.[105] It would be safe to assume that this level of religious fanaticism was a prime example of the perceived barbarianism of Christianity in the eyes of pagan aristocrats such as Volusianus would have found most unsettling.

Letter 134 is not significant to this paper, since it is from Augustine to Proconsul Apringius and does not relate to the correspondence between Augustine, Volusianus and Marcellinus.[106] Letter 135 is our main letter, since it is from Volusianus to Augustine and it is a response to letter 132. In it Volusianus, as requested by Augustine, asks the bishop about some key points in Christian teaching he finds problematic. In the beginning of the letter Volusianus pays his respects to the bishop and quoting the old pagan writer Plautus, assigns himself to be taught by Augustine on Christian doctrine, since he finds himself never too old to learn new wisdom.[107] He also claims that Augustine's reputation demands him to come up with satisfactory answers, almost a challenge and an odd addition to the polite letter.[108] Volusianus starts the questions with a story of a symposium that he attended in Carthage. In this gathering his friends were talking about Christianity, and Volusianus asks Augustine to clarify some questions they had. The first problem concerned the virgin birth of Christ and God binding himself in

[105] Alexander Evers: *Augustine on the Church (Against the Donatists)* in A Companion to Augustine, edited by Mark Vessey). Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Chichester, Great-Britain. 2012, p.378
[106] Ep. 134
[107] Ep. 135
[108] Translation:" You *recognize what is desired on your part. It is a matter of interest for your reputation that I come to know the answers to my questions, because ignorance may somehow or other be tolerated in other priests without harm to the worship of God, but when it comes to Augustine, the Bishop, whatever he may happen not to know is a failing in what is right."* Ep. 135.

human form. The quests had wondered on how can God be the ruler of the world even though he is bound in flesh to live on earth in a fragile body. The second problem was with the miracles of Christ, which the symposium members saw as too mundane for God. Volusianus writes that at this point the other quests, including himself interrupted the un-named attendant that was asking these things, and concludes that these questions need to be answered by someone of higher knowledge in the faith, since "when mysteries are imprudently violated, harmless error might be turned to sin."[109]

Letter 136 is from Marcellinus, who was also present at the symposium, to Augustine. Marcellinus writes to Augustine about additional questions that were raised in the symposium that Volusianus for some reason did not write about in his letter. Marcellinus seems to feel the need to stress to Augustine the importance of his answer and to "*reply with greater care*" to the accusations that eloquent but false speakers may make against Christ.[110] It seems almost as if the discussion and convincing Volusianus and the other members of the symposium seemed so important to Marcellinus that he felt the need to write to Augustine and stress the importance of his answer. Marcellinus also demands a sufficient answer to defend their mutual faith in the face of his friends' critique, writing that he is "not unmindful of your promise, but rather demand its fulfillment"[111]. He even taunts Augustine by telling him about a wealthy landowner from his diocese in Hippo who apparently had made fun of Augustine's inadequate response previously.[112]

The additional questions that Marcellinus places in Volusianus's mouth start with Volusianus's confusion about why a God that previously demanded sacrifices would send His son to be in person the ultimate sacrifice and with this final sacrificial lamb discredit the sacrifices and union made in the Old Testament. According to Marcellinus, Volusianus was baffled by how an eternal and infinite God could be so fickle and change His mind in the course of His salvation history.[113] He also writes about accusations made by the diners at the symposium about the miracles of Christ, and how they were no more significant than those of

[109] Ep. 135, 2.
[110] Ep. 136, 1.
[111] Ep. 136, 3.
[112] ibid.
[113] Translation: "--- *one could hardly give a clear reason why this God, who is also maintained to be the God of the Old Testament, took delight in the new sacrifices after having rejected the old ones."* Ep. 136, 2.

know magicians like Apollinius and Apuleius, and asks Augustine to clarify why the miracles of Christ were those of God and not of a mortal magician.[114]

Marcellinus also writes that Volusianus was concerned about Christian emperors, who according to him had weakened the empire during their reign. Volusianus appears to fear that following Christian doctrine such as turning the other cheek and loving one's enemy is dangerous to the well-being of the state.[115] The question about the security of the state is in my view closely connected to the trauma still felt by Volusianus and his kind of the catastrophe in the year 410, when the Visigoths lead by Alaric attacked and sacked Rome. The pagan Roman aristocrats blamed Christianity for the devastation, saying that forgetting the old gods and neglecting their sacrifice had made the city lose the god's protection.[116] For example Zozimus wrote in The New History that Rome would not have fallen under siege if it had remained loyal to the gods of the ancestors who had since the birth of Rome protected the city.[117]

Augustine answers these concerns in letters 137 to Volusianus and 138 to Marcellinus. Especially letter 137 is long and feels as if it is trying to belabor the point it is making. In letter 137 Augustine's rhetorical training shines through, he is following Cicero's teaching of repetition, thorough reasoning and sentimentality, and arriving to the ultimate point through lengthy discussion.[118] In letter 137 Augustine replies that before he can talk about the actual doctrine, Volusianus must get inside the mindset of Christian. True interpretation of doctrine must begin with Scripture, because only in the scripture one can find the required humility and accumulative wisdom needed to understand the faith.[119] The letter is significant because in it Augustine defends Christian doctrine to this powerful pagan aristocrat and in the last part of the letter explains why Christianity does indeed protect the empire as opposed to being dangerous to its well-being. Augustine states that the founding principle of the two natures of God, both divine and human at the same time, never diminish His ultimate control and rule overt the world. Thus God's humanity in Christ does not reduce his rule of

[114] Ep. 136, 1.
[115] Translation: "*Moreover, the preaching and teaching of Christ in in no way compatible with the practices of the state --- For who would permit an enemy to take something from him or would not want to redress evil by the right of war against a plunderer of a Roman province?"* Ep. 136, 2.
[116] Cameron: *Christ meets me everywhere: Augustine's early figurative exegesis*. 2012, p. 4.
[117] Sam Moorhead and David Studdard: *AD 410: The Year that shook Rome*. The British Museum Press, London, UK. 2010, p. 168.
[118] Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate.* 2014, pp. 149-152.
[119]Ep. 137; Cameron: *Christ meets me everywhere.* 2012. p. 4.

the universe.[120] Augustine stresses his point by using the human senses as proof that the things we perceive and believe to be true about the laws of the world are confined to five flawed senses, and if we cannot for certain prove our own perceptions of the world, how could we possibly understand the nature and limitations (or more accurately, the lack of them) of God.[121]

Augustine answers Volusianus's amazement over God lowering Himself to our level and assuming the weak form of a child by explaining that God becoming man in the form of Christ was required for us to experience His grace. Augustine writes that humankind could not have understood God's love or the level of his miracles, since to God all things are possible, but such a sacrifice in our form makes the enormity of God's love apparent to all.[122] Augustine writes, that the miracles of Christ culminate in his resurrection, and defeating death must surely be a sufficient miracle to show Christ's divinity.[123] He then shortly explains the salvation history and explains why humanity needs the forgiving sacrifice of Christ.[124] In the end he talks about the Christians virtues of love of God, obedience to the state and the elders and loving one's neighbor are things that will surely make the empire even stronger than before.[125]

The last letter relevant to this study is letter 138 in which Augustine writes back to Marcellinus and answers the additional questions he asked after Volusianus's letter. The problem about old sacrifices in the Old Testament and how Volusianus thought they had been replaced by Christ's ultimate sacrifice is addressed first. Augustine explains that different times need different actions, and that the old sacrifices were not at all in vain, but in preparation to Christ.[126] As to the allegations that Christianity is dangerous for the wellbeing of the empire, Augustine writes that an empire can be founded on nothing better than Christian virtues, since Christ's commandments are mainly for the heart, and a Christian ruler is allowed to defend his people. He reminds Marcellinus that St. Paul and Christ himself did not obey the commandment to always answer with love, but that it should rather be a matter of the heart, and not of the state, and that

[120] Translation:" He *is able to be whole everywhere and to be contained in no place; He is able to come without leaving where He was and is able to go away without abandoning where he came from."* Ep. 137, 4.
[121] Ep. 137, 5-8.
[122] Translation:" --- *would it not be believed that He did not in any way assume a true man, and would it not destroy what He did out of mercy if He did everything as a miracle?"*. Ep. 137, 9.
[123] Ep. 137, 10.
[124] Ep. 137, 15.
[125] Ep. 137, 16.
[126] Ep. 138, 2-8.

Christianity does not deny all forms of war.[127] This is a good example of how Augustine was not opposed to stretch the limits of Christian doctrine in order to entice this powerful senator to Christianity, since no one could argue that in the gospels a justification for war would be easy to find.

Augustine also states, that old Roman virtues were lost long before Christianity, and Christianity is in fact restoring the noble ways to the empire.[128] For Augustine, Christianity was the key to bringing back the old respectable Roman, and in addition would bring great peace of mind and a rested soul, as we see in De Catehizandis Rudibus, an advice on teaching prospective Christians. He writes that one should follow Christian teaching not only for the good of the whole public but also for one's own happiness: "For quickly will you feel that the fruits of righteousness are sweeter than those of unrighteousness, and that a man finds a more genuine and pleasurable joy in the possession of a good conscience in the midst of troubles than in that of an evil conscience in the midst of delights."[129] The letter ends with Augustine's bafflement and amusement that the symposium attendants had even compared earthly magicians like Apuleius and Apollonius to Christ. But even worse for him is the continued support given to pagan gods even though learned men themselves admit to them being mere "fables." He is considerably less careful with his reprise on paganism versus Christianity as a virtuous state practice when writing to his Christian friend, and states: "Still, then, they praise the luxurious, licentious and clearly sacrilegious happiness of the state that invented these disgraceful actions of the gods --- Christian teaching is said to be opposed to the state because it has exposed the perversity and falsity of these demons."[130] The letter's ending again show the debate in the Empire over which deity or deities to worship in order to make sure a catastrophe like Alaric and his Visigoth never again threaten Rome.

2.6.1. Genre: Letter writing in late Antiquity Rome

Augustine's, Volusianus's and Marcellinus's letters appear fairly formal. The correspondence between a bishop and two high state officials was anything but mere philosophical conversation, it also had political aspects. For example, in one

[127] Ep. 138, 9-14.
[128] Ep. 138, 15-16.
[129] De Catehizandis Rudibus. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1303.htm. New Advent, Fathers of the Church. 25.
[130] Ep. 138, 18-20.

of Augustine's letters to Marcellinus Augustine expresses his view on how to judge and punish the Donatist rebels in Marcellinus's jurisdiction.[131] He thus used personal correspondence as a political tool, something which might have been at play in the initial motivation to contact Volusianus in the first place. In late antiquity Rome public letters and private letters were mostly the same thing, since an official's or a clergyman's private life was not separated from his public one. Public matters were addressed in personal letters, since most of politics was done through personal relationships. According to Adolf Deissmann this is part of the reason why the letters of Paul are in fact just letters, and not epistles, since *epistola* means a public speech or text that is written in letter form but is in fact, not a letter to anyone. Deissmann however neglects to take in to account that Paul's letters were definitely designed to be read publicly among the congregation.[132] This is also part of reason why these letters are so formal and polite in nature, embarrassing the recipient with harsh criticism that all would hear in public readings would not have been courteous. In this sense some of Augustine's other letters differ quite significantly from the usual polite form, since many of them were corrections to congregations and to specific members of the Church that the bishop felt needed correcting. [133]

Another popular view that has been used to distinguish between epistles and private letters is the language. In private letters the language is warm and friendly, showing the actual feelings of the writer towards the recipient, whereas epistles are impersonal and the style indicates them to be written for a wider audience and for future generations as well. This distinction is how ever quite modern. In late antiquity Rome the private letters between public figures, such as those between a bishop and a senator, were often very elegant in language and in rhetoric, but they also had the warm and praising compliment from the writer to the recipient. Even though Deissmann's view on Paul's letters not being epistles was somewhat conflicted, it shows the importance of personal letters as a part of public teaching and politics.[134]

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[131] Ep. 133.
[132] For example, in Romans 1:1, where Paul addresses his letter "*to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints*". Translated from 1992 translation of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Bible.
[133] Jennifer Ebbeler: *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's letters.* Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2012, pp. 6-8.
[134] Stanley K. Stowers: *Letter writing in Greco-Roman antiquity*, The Westminster Press, Pennsylvania, USA. 1986, pp. 27-28.

Receiving letters was thus both public distribution of information as well as a show of recognition towards the recipient. The Greco-Roman world was dominated by a culture of honor, and correspondence was also a show of who is invited to be involved in important matters, in other words who is respected enough to receive letters from important members of society. From the days of Aristotle rhetoric was the practice of giving praise or blame, and letter writing was a form of either calling a person honorable and raising his social status or showing his lack of honor and thus reducing his status. Having friends in high levels of society and having them speak on one's behalf was a way to raise the whole family's status. The same way accusations against one's honor from a member of a higher social class could bring the whole family to shame.[135]

In addition to the culture of honor, Romans were dominated by a culture of hierarchy as well. According to Stanley Stowers the Greco-Roman world had three categories of social relationships:

"First are hierarchical relations between subordinates and super ordinates, best exemplified by the social institutions of the client-patron relationship. Second are relationships between equals epitomized by the Greek and Roman institutions of friendship. Third are the social relationships of the household, which combine characteristics of both hierarchical relations and relations between equals."[136]

Hierarchy was essential to the Roman world. Everything from the high stages of government and the court to the basic levels of family relationships was dominated by this sense of hierarchy. Social climbing was only possible through having friends in high positions in the empire, and thus limited to middle classes at best. These supporters were called patrons, and in return for their help to elevate the client's social status the client made public statements of the patron's greatness and most importantly, his honor.[137] The polite form in which both Volusianus and Marcellinus begin their letters to Augustine follows this idea of the client writing to the patron, an older and distinguished member of society. Volusianus starts his letter 135 by calling Augustine "... my truly holy lord and rightly venerable father"[138] and Marcellinus begins in letter 136 "… my very

[135] ibid. 1986, p. 29.
[136] ibid. 1986, pp. 27-28.
[137] ibid. 1986, p. 28.
[138] Ep. 135.

venerable father singularly worthy of honor and every service from me"[139], thus not only showing his position as lower in hierarchy, but also the reciprocal nature of their relationship. Augustine gives his wisdom and advice to Marcellinus, in return Marcellinus promises his services, at least in principle. Augustine also starts his letters to both in the context of this client – patron – relationship, he calls Volusianus "illustrious lord and rightly most excellent son"[140] and Marcellinus "illustrious and rightly noble lord and dearest son"[141]

In addition to the culture of honor and hierarchy, Greco-Roman letter writing was characterized by the culture of friendship. Letters were written and read to form bonds of amicitia, which meant all kinds of mutually beneficial relationships.[142] Forming friendships was not only a show of people finding common ground and bonding, but also a way to rise in society. Romans saw friends as equals, and so a high level friend made the person rise in social standing as well. This translated in letter writing, and all letters traditionally followed the pattern of long salutations and assertions of friendship in the beginning and during the text the praising of the recipient's many attributes.[143] These come from Greek culture, and transmitted quite well to the Roman society. Romans however understood friendship slightly different than the Greeks, and friends were not required to show great amounts of loving feelings towards each other. In addition, in Roman culture friendships were rarely between just the two individuals, but also between the families.[144] For example Augustine and senator Volusianus had a mutual friend Marcellus as a basis for their friendly correspondence, and Augustine was also friends with Volusianus's family, especially with his mother.

Letters were an essential, if not a very reliable form of forming friendships between people from different parts of the empire. The official postal service was reserved for imperial affairs and for soldiers and normal citizens had to rely on messengers or on finding someone who was traveling to the letter's recipient's town to deliver the letter. Rich families and officials often had their own messenger, for example Augustine used a priest from his diocese to deliver some

[139] Ep. 136.
[140] Ep. 132.
[141] Ep 133.
[142] Ebbeler: *Disciplining Christians.* 2012, pp. 6-7.
[143] For example, Volusianus shows great flattery to Augustine, a Bishop of a distant region who is lower in rank, and begins his letter by writing *"You, a man of goodness and an example of righteousness ---",* and concludes his request of answers with *"There you have, O man capable of every honor, my confession of ignorance --- May the highest divinity keep Your Reverence safe and sound, my truly holy lord and rightly venerable father."* Ep. 135.
[144] Stowers: *Letter writing in Greco-Roman antiquity*. 1986, pp. 29-30.

of his letters. Correspondence between people from a far was dependent on the speed and reliability of the messengers. Sometimes the correspondence was delayed for months or even cut off, for example Augustine's first letter to St. Jerome never made it to Syria but was later found circulating Italy. The friendship between Augustine and a Roman aristocrat he had never met was based on exchanging letters. Augustine praised letters, according to him two people from distant places and different world views could meet and interchange ideas through letters.[145] The world of a 70-year old semi-ascetic, devout Catholic bishop and a young Roman aristocrat who held his ancestors' pagan faith with pride could meet through the medium of polite, long philosophical letters.

2.7. De Catehizandis Rudibus

Augustine wrote *De Catehizandis Rudibus* by request of deacon Deogratias around the years 399-405. The deacon was in charge of the first catechesis,[146] catechizing the prospective Christians in his area, and asked Augustine for some help on how to approach the new prospects and how to teach them about the fundamentals of Christianity. Deogratias was popular and apparently a talented theologian, but he expresses to Augustine that he feels his teaching is becoming *"dull and distasteful".*[147] The text is aimed at catechizing the *rudibus*[148], the outsiders who were not familiar with the faith, not people who are already catechumens. A catechumen was already on his way to baptism, but Deogratias is asking for advise in regard to people who were not familiar with the Church, "the uninstructed" as Boniface Ramsay translated.[149] He asks advice on how much of the Scriptures to include and how extensively he should cover them, and if he should use an exhortation at the end or not.[150]

The text begins with Augustine's reflections on why and how language is too modest and inadequate to deliver the message in the right way.[151] He then moves on to the appropriate narration that should be used, mainly that the catechumen must be taught the concept of salvation history and why God needed

[145] Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. 1999, p. 298.
[146] William Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate*. 2014, p. 132
[147] Cat. Rud. 1, William Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate*. 2014, p. 131
[148] *Rudibus* is a plural of the term *rudis*, meaning uncultivated, unskilled, raw.
[149] Boniface Ramsay: *De Catehizandis Rudib*us in *Augustine through the ages: An Encyclopedia*. 1999, p.144
[150] Cat. Rud. 1, Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate.* 2014, pp. 131-132
[151] Cat. Rud. 2-4.

to come down to man in Christ.[152] The use of salvation history this early on in the Church was rare, and in this text Augustine also introduced his terminology of the two cities, one of man and one of God. Salvation history is divided into six ages, five of them having been in the Old Testament, the sixth was the coming of Christ and the present age of the Church, and the seventh would come when Christ would come back to bring about the final judgement.[153] Augustine is thus professing the idea of the Old Testament as a prologue to the New one, emphasizing the much loved ideal of long ancestry and mythical history of Christianity. As a common rule Augustine writes that the person who is inquiring into the Christian faith should be taught the Scriptures and the Church's history up until the present age, with Christ as the center around which salvation history is happening. Augustine also discusses the matter of weariness, and how the teacher and the prospective catechumate might avoid it and attain joy from learning the Christian doctrine.[154] He also suggests the teaching of allegorical exegesis, emphasizing the spiritual interpretation of Scripture instead of a literal one in case the text presents a problem or there is a passage that is not in line with Christian ethics. The text has two sample cases that Augustine gives Deogratias as examples, first a long and thorough one and then a compressed version. Augustine writes that the now a little more introduced pupil should also be told to watch out for bad teaching inside the Church and from other members, and finally to live a good, God-fearing life and wait for the joys of Heaven.[155]

Augustine believed, that the educated elite needed to be taught differently than the uneducated peasants. [156] This is where this text becomes relevant to our research at hand, I will focus on the part of the text where Augustine is writing about catechizing the aristocracy in particular. He writes that the educated, city-bred men must first be asked if his hope of baptism is due to him trying to achieve some advantage in life, and is not a true calling to find Christ. This was probably not the case for most educated citizens, certainly not for the high elite such as Volusianus, who clearly felt no need to convert during his life and still had a very successful political career. As discussed before, the Emperor would not have had

[152] Cat. Rud. 5-6.
[153] Cat. Rud. 6, 22.
[154] Cat. Rud. 10-14.
[155] Ramsay: *Saint Augustine*. 2011, p.145.
[156] Augustine writes that even though the disease is the same for the unlearned and the educated, the medicine must be tailored to the needs of the class who the clergy man is addressing. Cat. Rud. 23.

the audacity or capability to demand baptism of his ruling elite. Augustine however tells Deogratias to remind such converts that one cannot be united to Christ's Church for temporal gain.[157] The fear of opportunist converts seems to have been real for the Church, and even in the fourth century Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem was worried that some might, even on the eve of their baptism, admit to profane motives for their conversion such as obeying one's master, pleasing a loved one or conforming to a friend's worldview.[158]

Augustine and the Church was faced with a cultural problem in conversion as well. Since the Church and the Christian Emperor could not force the elite to change, they had to make Christianity a pleasant and easy transition. The problem the Church recognized even in the last half of the fourth century was selling Christianity's strict moral rules to the elite. The life of the Roman aristocrat involved thing like astronomy, theater shows and public games, all things to be avoided in strict Christian teaching.[159] Apparently many who had begun the process had for some reason or another delayed the actual baptism, and some feared that the big difference in life style might have been a deterrent to finalizing their Christian transformation.[160] In his example cases to Deogratias Augustine seeks to explain the teachings in a more philosophical way rather than emphasizing Christ's teachings as commandments. For example, when he gives an example of a well learned man professing his desire to live a Christian life, Augustine explains the Christian ideal of forsaking temporal and material benefits by pointing out the unease and stress that comes with gaining and upholding vast belongings instead of the more religious idea of the sin of greed.[161] When Augustine writes of the sinful action of attending public games, the most un-Christian spectacle of the people, he again uses reasoning rather than moralizing, and writes about how the games should be avoided simply because they are not

[157] Cat. Rud. 5, 16.
[158] Harmless: *Augustine and the Catechumate.* 2014, p. 65.
[159] Augustine also addresses this issue, and writes: *"--- who nevertheless are minded to find their pleasure and rest in dainty meats, and in fornications, and in those theatres and spectacles which are at their disposal in great cities for nothing.--- Moreover, in their eager devotion to the public spectacles, they come to resemble demons, as they incite men by their cries to wound each other, and instigate those who have done them no hurt to engage in furious contests with each other, while they seek to please an insane people."*. Cat. Rud. 25.
[160] ibid. 2014, pp. 65 – 68.
[161] Translation: "*For if it be that a man seeks to find his rest in wealth, he is rendered proud rather than at ease. Do we not see how many have lost their riches on a sudden—how many, too, have been undone by reason of them, either as they have been coveting to possess them, or as they have been borne down and despoiled of them by others more covetous than themselves? And even should they remain with the man all his life long, and never leave their lover, yet would he himself (have to) leave them at his death."* Cat. Rud. 16:24.

good for the mind, saying: "How then can that mind keep the soundness of peace which feeds on strifes and contentions? For just as is the food which is received, such is the health which results."[162]

Along with having consideration for the aristocrat's way of life, Augustine also writes on the specific aspects of teaching those with "a liberal education" as it is translated on the New Advent site, meaning those who have had classical training. He writes that one must consider the already vast knowledge of the well-educated potential catechumen, and reminds Deogratias that "it is customary with men of this class to inquire carefully into all things".[163] Augustine also writes that Deogratias should arouse interest in Christianity through literature, and he should ask about the texts that might have induced the aristocrat to seek Christian council and have made him consider conversion, naturally revoking the heretical ones and emphasizing the ones that invoke the true faith. He also reminds Deogratias not to take on himself the role of a teacher, higher in rank than his pupil, but to act as an intellectual equal and discuss the Christian faith with all the respect that an educated man requires.[164]

2.8. Symmachus: Third Relatio

Quintus Aurelius Symmachus was one of the most famous political figures of his time, and he has been characterized in previous research as the face of the so-called pagan revival. He was especially famous for his rhetorical and oratorical skills, and for example in Macrobius's Saturnalia, a collection of speeches placed in the mouths of great intellectuals of the time, he is described in a list of great intellectuals of Rome throughout her history as the height of "fat and flowery"[165] rhetoric, placing him and his talent in the same listing as those of Vergil and Cicero.[166] His *cursus honorum* was impressive, holding the title of *pontifex maior* in the pagan priesthood, city prefect and an envoy to the imperial court.[167]

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[162] Cat. Rud. 25.
[163] Cat. Rud. 8:12.
[164] ibid, 12.
[165] Gavin Kelly: *Pliny and Symmachus*. Arethusa 46:2 (2013), 261-287. The John Hopkins University Press. 2013, p.261.
[166] In Latin: "*quattuor sunt, inquit Eusebius, genera dicendi: copiosum, in quo Cicero dominatur; breue, in quo Sallustius regnat; iccum, quod Frontoni adscribitur; pingue et floridum, in quo Plinius Secundus quondam et nunc nullo ueterum minor noster Symmachus luxuriatur."* Kelly: Pliny and Symmachus. 2013, pp.261-262.
[167] J.R. Martindale: The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Vol I, A.D. 260-395. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Great-Britain. 1971, p.2. From now on I will refer to this source as PLRE 1 and volume 2 as PRLE 2.

Symmachus wrote forty-nine relationes during his time as city prefect in 384-385. They are letters from him to the Emperor, which he wrote at a fast paste, approximately one per week.[168] In late antiquity Roman law the term *relatio* meant a detailed account on a legal matter that had been appealed to the imperial court after civil jurisdiction, so it was a way to appeal straight to the Emperor. As city prefect Symmachus was the head of administration in Rome and judged all matters concerning members of the senatorial class. As Cristiana Sogno points out, even though as city prefect Symmachus had to write these reports to the Emperor on various legal issues, the *relationes* are anything but simple reports, they show Symmachus's excellent talent as an orator and his skill in rhetoric. He is indeed appealing a case to the Emperor also in the third *relatio*, but the text also conveys Symmachus's passion and his knowledge in Roman tradition, and as Sogno calls it, "a genuinely Roman pride".[169]

Symmachus wrote his Third Relatio in 384 as a plea to Emperor Valentinian II to restore the Altar of Victory to the Senate House.[170] The Altar had a significant symbolical value, which is apparent even among the Christian senators, who, to bishop Ambrose's nuisance, did not object to Symmachus writing the appeal.[171] In his letter to Valentinian II, Ambrose calls these senators that supported the petition "those Christians in name only".[172] Amborse had had the support of the Christian Senators earlier when he campaigned for the Altar to be removed in the first place by Emperor Gratian, but this sympathy came mostly from the new senators that had received their status from service to the Emperor, and were not members of old, traditional elite families.[173] It would thus appear that the Altar was revered among a certain social class, the traditional Roman elite, and was defended regardless of whether the senator was a Christian or a pagan.

Symmachus begins by expressing his disappointment in the previous Emperor's refusal to receive his first delegation on the matter to the court of

[168] Symmachus was in office for eight months and wrote 49 relationes to the Emperor in total. Cristiana Sogno: *Q. Aurelius Symmachus – A Political Biography*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, USA. 2006, p.31.
[169] Sogno, Christiana: *Q.A. Symmachus.* 2006, pp.32-34.
[170] ibid. 2006, p. 49
[171] Robert R. Chenault: *Beyond Pagans and Christians: Politics and Intra-Christian conflict in the Controversy over the Altar of Victory.* In Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome, ed. by Salzman, Sághy, and Lizzi Testa. 2016, p.49.
[172] Sogno: *Q.A. Symmachus*. 2006, p.50.
[173] ibid. 2006, p. 49-50.

Milan.[174] He emphasizes that his complain is not of a personal religious feeling, but that of a concerned Prefect of the State, and compels the Emperor to hear the plea for the good of the State,[175] and writes: "And let no one think that I am defending the cause of religion only. For from deeds of this kind have arisen all the misfortunes of the Roman race."[176] He reminds the Emperor that he and the Senate behind him are indeed also looking after the Emperor and his interest, and stresses that the sacrifice the senators perform at the Altar is for the continued success of the Emperor.[177] He also writes that the ceremony at the Altar is important for the honesty of the Senate's session, since "All things are indeed filled with God, and no place is safe for the perjured, but to be urged in the very presence of religious forms has great power in producing a fear of sinning."[178] Symmachus is saying that the Altar is much more than a relic of nostalgic old men, but that it is a guarantee that the Senate performs it's duties to the best interest of the Emperor and of the Empire.

The other aspect of Symmachus's Third Relatio is tradition and preserving Rome and her memory. Much like swearing on the Bible in modern court sessions, to Symmachus the Altar is a link to the cultural heritage of the Romans and a sign that history is not forgotten. Symmachus writes: "Allow us, we beseech you, as old men to leave to posterity what we received as boys. The love of custom is great."[179] As previously discussed, respecting the ways of the ancestors and upholding Roman tradition was part of Roman virtues, *pietas* and *humanitas*.[180] This same need for passing on the traditions of previous generations was felt throughout the aristocratic class even among the Christian aristocrats, as we can see in the text of Saturnalia by Macrobius, most likely a Christian, who in his foreword dedicates the text to his son, and expresses the importance of the younger generations learning old rites and festivals, and all that belongs to the culture of Rome.[181] I will look at Saturnalia more closely in the next chapter. This sense of a struggle of worldviews and a cultural identity that needed to be preserved for prosperity is very significant in the pagan response to ever growing

[174] Translation:" But *through wicked men audience as refused e by the divine Emperor, otherwise justice would not have been wanting* ---*"Third* Relatio, 1.
[175] Third Relatio, 2
[176] Third Relatio, 14.
[177] Third Relatio, 3-4.
[178] Third Relatio, 6.
[179] Third Relatio, 5.
[180] Castrén: Uusi Antiikin historia. 2011, pp. 312-313.
[181] Michele Salzman: *On Roman Time – The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*. University of California Press, USA. 1990, p.14

Christianization of the Empire, and that is why I included Third Relatio in this thesis. Even though it is written some 30 years before Volusianus's letter, Volusianus's father was a member of the so-called circle of Symmachus, or atleast was an intimate contemporary and colleague.[182], and this along with Volusianus's social class makes it most likely that he shared this value of Roman tradition as well.

2.9. Macrobius: Saturnalia

Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius was long believed to have been a contemporary of the aristocrats of the late fourth century he was writing about, and he was taught to have belonged to the circle of Symmachus. Some scholars have identified him with another Macrobius, who held the office of *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, the imperial chamberlain, in 422. But as Alan Cameron has noted, if Macrobius had been referred to by only one name, it would have been Theodosius, as the third name was the one used if only one name was mentioned. He also refers to himself in his work on rhetoric as Theodosius. This along with the fact that the imperial chamberlain had to be a eunuch and Macrobius dedicated two of his works to his son, he most probably was not the imperial chamberlain of 422. In fact, only one Theodosius of the rank of *vir clarissimus* (as he is called in two of his works) can be found, a praetorian prefect of Italy in 430. This would mean that he wrote Saturnalia in the 430's during what Charles W. Hedrick Jr calls the rehabilitation of the younger Flavian. He held the prefecture right after Volusianus did who was in the same post in 429.[183] He is writing after the sack of Rome in 410, since he is writing as a *vir illustris*, a title he received after becoming praetorian prefect. He had in this case seen the fast decline of the power of Rome, the Visigoths had left the eternal city in a state of destruction, most of Spain was lost to the Suebi and the provinces of Gaul and North Africa had seen large invasions by the Goths and the Vandals, not to mention intra-Christian conflict.[184]

To a contemporary of such times, it must have seemed like the glory of Rome was being destroyed in big, devastating gulps. He dedicated *Saturnalia* to

[182] Brown: *Aspects of Christianization*. 1961, p.6.
[183] Robert A. Kaster: (ed. and transl.): Saturnalia vol. I, Books 1-2. Harvard University Press. Loeb Classical Library. LCL 510. 2011, p.xxix
[184] ibid. 2011, pp. xiii-xvii; PRLRE 2, pp. 1102-1103.; Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, pp 79-85.

his son, and he writes about the importance of the future generations learning their history and the ways of the ancestors, a theme also relevant in the discussions of the aristocrats he writes about.[185] Robert Kaster points out that the idea of a past full of glory and perfect knowledge was the key point to Saturnalia, as Macrobius himself writes that "We must always revere the days gone by, if we have any sense."[186] This nostalgic feeling of a glorious past now turning into a chaotic and uncertain future is a theme I believe was central to the pagan Roman aristocrats of the first few decades of the fifth century, and this is why I use Saturnalia as a source, even though it's dating is around 20 years after Volusianus's correspondence.

Saturnalia, Macrobius's third publication, is a narration of a dialogue set on the three days of celebrations during the Saturnalia festival in the year 384 between important members of the Roman elite in late fourth century[187], "men who command respect for their learning no less than for their noble birth".[188] They are discussing "all that the ancients developed to perfection"[189], meaning the fundamentals of classical education, to which all of the participants contribute and discuss from their own special field of expertise. This symposium of learned aristocrats discussed primarily Virgil's poetry among with what Kaster calls, "matters ridiculous and sublime". Virgil is presented in these discussions as the key to understanding all of human knowledge.[190] Virgil was one of Rome's most celebrated poets, born on October 15th in the year 70 B.C in Mantua.[191] He wrote the famous *Aeneid,* which is also important for this research as I have discussed, as the story of the young Trojan prince who led the remaining survivors of Troy to Rome and who then became the forefathers of the people of Rome was very important not only to the cultural heritage of the roman aristocracy as well as for Augustine's allegorical interpretation to the role of the church in the new Christian Empire as the new Rome.[192]

According to Kaster, Macrobius has been seen in two lights, as a plagiarist who simply copied down roman tradition in the form of learned discussions, and as a man dedicated to promoting the views of famous pagan aristocrats of the late

[185] Michele Salzman: *On Roman Time*. 1990, p.14
[186] Saturnalia 3.14.2., Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, p. xviii.
[187] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, p. 83.
[188] Saturnalia 1.4.4.
[189] Saturnalia 1.3.1.
[190] Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, pp. xi-xviii.
[191] Nicholas Hofstall: *A Companion to the study of Virgil*. 2001, p.2
[192] ibid. 2001, p.73.

fourth century, mainly Vettius Agorius Praetextatus[193], Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and Virius Nicomachus Flavianus[194]. The discussion is set in a time of great cultural turmoil after the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate in 382, only a year before the dating of the discussions of *Saturnalia*. Along with the Altar's removal as a message against paganism and for Christianity, the Emperor had also removed state subsidies for civic cults.[195] For the pagan aristocrats of the late fourth century, the message from the government must have seemed loud and clear, and even though the concept of a cultural war is too strong for the situation, the pagan aristocrats were undoubtedly in a struggle to preserve their own cultural heritage. Macrobius is however writing long after the conflict, and in a fairly idealizing way, using the famous characters of the conflict as literary devices.[196]

The largest surviving portion of Saturnalia we have that is dedicated to religious discussion is Praetextatus's elucidation of pontifical law, the law concerning the pontifex- priests, and especially the sacrifices they offered the gods. Naturally as in all aspects of late antiquity culture, nothing is completely void of religious meaning, and the discussion on Vergil takes a highly religious tone. Macrobius raises Vergil to the post of *pontifex maximus*, the keeper of the old official state religion. The revered poet is given the title interestingly in a time when the rulers of the emperors themselves refused it. As to the religious convictions of Macrobius himself, there is no certain information. As for most members of the aristocracy in the early fifth century, his knowledge of the pagan rites and festivals he writes about is based on literary evidence, not his own experience. The paganism in Saturnalia is one found in old texts and history, as Hedrick calls it, "an intellectualized paganism, a religion manifested more in literature than in ritual."[197] The main information we have is in book 1, where he discusses, using the voice of Praetextatus, the idea that all the Greco-Roman gods

[193] According to the inscription on his grave site Praetextatus held several religious pagan offices, including being a priest of Vesta and the Sun and being the overseer of the taurobolium in the cult of Mithras. His public career was that of as typical aristocratic senator, with offices such as city prefect, governor and proconsul. Michael Maas: *Readings in Late Antiquity: A sourcebook*. Routledge, London, Great-Britain. 2000, p. 173.

[194] Flavianus had been accused by bishops Ambrose and Augustine as having been a prime example of a pagan rebel and opponent to Christianity in the mid 350's and a lieutenant in the army of the usurper Eugenius. Flavianus joined Eugenius's rebellion in 394, was forced to commit suicide and suffered a *damnatio memoriae* in the same year. His son the younger Flavian was allowed to keep his life, but was disgraced and retired from the post of city prefect and was rehabilitated to his former rank only in 431. Hedrick*: History and silence*. 2000, pp. 5-6.

[195] Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, pp.xii-xiii.

[196] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, pp. 84-88.

[197] ibid. 2000, p. 81

as well as other deities from different provinces are actually only manifestations of the Sun, a major theme in Neoplatonist philosophy. This does not however provide us with much insight into his own religious views, as the matter is discussed more as an intellectual matter from the viewpoint of conclusions from information gathered instead of a theological discussion into the nature of divinity, let alone doctrine.[198]

Kastner however concludes that Macrobius must have been a Christian, firstly because of his name Theodosius. If he was named after the Christian Emperor Theodosius the Great (since the name seldom occurs before his reign among the Roman aristocracy), his parents might have been supporters of the Christian Emperor. Kastner also writes that if Macrobius is the praetorian prefect of Italy in 430 as previously discussed, it would have been unlikely that he would have held such a high post as a pagan.[199] Hedrick came to the same conclusion, and noted that since Macrobius was held high regard in the Christian court of Galla Placidia, "it seems certain that he must have been a Christian".[200] I however have to disagree with this particular conclusion, or at least the logic behind it. For example our main character in this thesis, Volusianus, was a pagan all his life up until his deathbed, and he was a very high ranking official, holding the office of *praefectus urbanus*, the city prefect of Rome in 417-418, *praefectus praetorio* in 428-429 and also served in the embassy dedicated to negotiations for an imperial marriage between the Christian Emperor Valentinian III and princess Eudoxia.[201] It is obvious that religious coercion in the first have od the fifth century did not exist towards the aristocracy of the Empire or at least did not influence them significantly as far as career advancement was concerned.

Literary evidence from Macrobius's writing would however suggest that he was indeed a Christian. As Kastner points out, his use of the term *pagani* as removed from *rustici*,[202] a term that a pagan roman would use as a synonym for peasant but a Christian Roman would use in the religious sense, especially here when the festival in question is a pagan one. He also writes in book II about the slaying of infants under the rule of Herod the Great, and he is in fact the only

[198] Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, p. xix
[199] ibid. 2011, pp.xix-xxii.
[200] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, pp. 78-80.
[201] PLRE vol. II, p.1185.
[202] Translation: "*The festivals held every ninth day provide the opportunities for the pagani and rustici to gather for purposes of trade or to see to their personal affairs*." Saturnalia 1.16.6. Macrobius is referring to the eight-day cycle of the traditional market week in Rome. Salzman: *On Roman Time.* 1990, pp.11-12.

secular writer up until that time that had mentioned this event.[203] If indeed Macrobius was a Christian and still wrote about the importance of pagan tradition with such passion, the theory of a harsh and bitter clash between the two faiths is very misleading. Macrobius at least seemed to have no problem writing from a pagan perspective and to press the importance of remembering the old ways of Rome, much like the Christian aristocrats during the Altar of Victory controversy I discussed earlier who, despite their own religion, saw the importance of maintaining the loved customs of Rome and their cultural heritage. Writing as a Christian in a predominately Christian Empire the text tells us something of the attitudes of the largely Christianized aristocracy, again as Brown had said, born in a new time longing for a past it had never itself experienced. Paganism was after all, at the time of Saturnalia's composition, a thing of the past that Macrobius urges us to be remember even though it is not practiced.[204]

2.10. Augustine, Volusianus and Marcellinus

The main characters of our main source, the correspondence of 411-412, are the three types of aristocracy that define the era. First we have our pagan senator, Volusianus, born and bred into the traditional, pagan culture of Rome, though born in a Christian era he is the son of one of the supporters of paganism during the so-called pagan revival. At the other end of the spectrum we have bishop Augustine, not as high in family background as Volusianus but a revered and politically active bishop in an increasingly strengthening Church. He, like Volusianus, enjoyed a classical education and was well read on the civilization of antiquity but unlike Volusianus, saw Christianity as the next step in the success that was Rome. In the middle is a mix of the two, Marcellinus, a Christian and an aristocratic senator and official of Rome, who is also friends with both Volusianus and Augustine. Next I will look at some of the differences between the three and see how it influenced the way each reacts to the growing influence of Christianity in the Empire. My main focus in on senator Volusianus, since he represents the completely pagan side of the argument and seems to share his father's circle's concern for the glory of Rome and if it can continue under these new Christian emperors.

[203] Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, pp. xxii-xxiii.
[204] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000, p.82.

2.11. Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus

Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus was from an old and respected senatorial family of the Caeonii that had been in high positions of power throughout their history, the, family's sons following the fathers to the office of senator. [205] According to J.R. Martindale, he was a pagan, whose father and grand-father before him held the post of *Prefectus urbanis Romanum*, the City prefect of Rome. Volusianus held this post in the year 417. He was also the proconsul of Africa before the year 412, and it is unsure whether he was serving an office in North Africa at the time of the correspondence or if he, like many others among his class, had escaped the devastation that had occurred in Rome. Augustine refers to him as *vir illurstris*, which means he was already in the highest senatorial position, which would mean that his proconsulship began before the correspondence.[206] There is no certainty of his paganism or the amount of his involvement with Christianity, since he does not himself state his religious affiliations, but he at least did not receive baptism until at his deathbed, and judging by his letter to Augustine in 412 he did not profess Christianity earlier in his life. He is writing as an informed outsider, not a catechumate. His social circle would also suggest paganism. Symmachus refers to him and his father as "the best part of the human race"[207] He was a close friend of Rutilius Namantius, who mentions him along with his father and grand-father in his book *De Reditu Suo* as an example of the kind of men that would ensure the survival of Rome[208] after the devastating siege and sack of Rome in 410, which, as discussed before, was blamed on the new Christian Empire's abandonment of the old gods.[209]

Volusianus however lived in a new Empire that had seen cultural transaction and assimilation between Christians and pagans for decades now. Volusianus's social circle or even his own family did not only include only pagan aristocrats, but Christian ones as well. One of these friends was the tribune Marcellinus, who is also the third part in the correspondence between Volusianus and Bishop Augustine. Volusianus and Marcellinus apparently became friends, as they met often during Volusianus's stay in Africa. We do not know much about the details of Volusianus's life as a whole, after his time in North Africa we have no letters

[205] Alan Kreider: *The Change of Conversion*. 2006, p. 65.
[206] PLRE II. pp. 1184-1185; Ep. 139.
[207] In Latin: *pars melior*. De Reditu Suo 1, 415. Claudii Rutilii Namatiani: De Reditu Suo, libri II. Ed. Lucianus Mueller. Lipsiae, In Aedibus B. G. Teybneri. 1870.
[208] In Latin: "*Laetior hic nostras crebrescit fama per aures: Consilium Romam paene redire fuit."* De Reditu Suo 1, 415. 1870.
[209] Brown: *Aspects of Christianization*. 1961, p.7.

or other sources on him until the year 436, when he appears in the hagiography of his niece, Melania the Younger. Volusianus was at this time in Constantinople, appointed by the Emperor to negotiate the final arrangements for an imperial marriage between the Emperor of the Western part of the Empire, Valentian III and the princess of the Eastern Empire, Eudoxia. Volusianus had gotten old, and his health was weakening. He was visited by Melania the Younger, who eventually convinced her uncle to convert to Christianity on his deathbed. Melania's hagiography states that Volusianus was moved by Melania's plea to convert during their conversations, and said that if and when he was to convert, he wanted to do it out of his own free will, so that he would not lose the rewards of Heaven that came from becoming the follower of Christ voluntarily. Melania, according to the hagiography, apparently even threatened to take the matter up with the Emperor, if her uncle would not have been willing to "free himself of the demons". Volusianus was baptized on his deathbed by the bishop Proclus[210], of whom Volusianus is told to have said to be an exemplary man, and that if there were just three men like Proclus in the city of Rome, all of the city would be Christian. [211] The conversion of Volusianus meant that another member from the illustrious family of the Caeonii was now Christian.[212]

2.11.1. The Caeonii: An example of an aristocratic Roman family

Volusianus's family was among the most noble and respected social class in Rome, the aristocratic elite. Volusianus's father Caeionius Rufius Albinus had even received the special honor of being appointed city prefect in Rome for a second term in 390/391, even though the office of city prefect usually lasted only one year and was a once in a lifetime post, the height of a senator's *cursus honorum*. and as Mark Humphries wrote, it "set the seal on a splendid career."[213] Rufius Albinus is also mentioned in the Saturnalia of Macrobius. where he is

[210] Proclus succeeded Maximian as the bishop of Constantine in 434 after some controversy with the Johannites. John Leemans, Peter Van Nuffelen, Shawn W. J. Keough, Carla Nicolaye: Episcopal elections in Late Antiquity. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, KG, Berlin, Germany. 2011, p.249

[211] Gerontius: *La vie latine de Sainte Mélanie*. Ed. and transl. by Patrick Laurence. Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio minor 41. Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem, Israel. 2002, LV.1-5.

[212] Alan Kreider: *The Change of Conversion.* 2006, pp. 65-69.

[213] Serge Lancel: *Saint Augustine,* Librairie Arthéme Fayard, London, Great Britain. 1999, p.314.; Humphries: *Roman senators and absent Emperors.* 2003, p.8.

presented as an expert of Roman antiquities.[214] The famous senator Symmachus refers to Rufius Albinus as part of "*the best part of the human race*", the old senators of Rome who were still loyal to the ancient ways of Rome.[215] The high level of respect towards these old senatorial families that still continued to maintain the pagan traditions was continuous even after the official Christianization of the Empire, which is apparent in the number of high office still held by the pagan elite in 450s to around 550s.[216] The idea that such families would be subject to religious coercion seems even more unlikely when considering the political weight of the prestige and wealth of Volusianus's class.

Alan Cameron divides the aristocrats of late antiquity Rome in five categories, the devout Christians such as Augustine, devout pagans such as Symmachus, moderate Christians and moderate pagans, and finally the ones that excluded themselves from these categories all together (this being the smallest group). The major groups were the moderates, such as Volusianus's family. They were proud pagans, but had close family members who were Christians and had no problem following the rule of Christian Emperors. Cameron writes that the biggest shift in religious affiliation happened between the 340s and 440s with the moderate pagans slowly becoming moderate Christians.[217]

The moderation of the Caeonii family could be the result of flowing with the times and adapting to the religious shift in the court, but also of a broad worldview that was common to the well-travelled elite of the Empire. Rome was vast and multicultural, and the aristocratic families travelled all over visiting friends and relatives, becoming more and more accustomed to different worldviews. In late antiquity Rome we can see a high level of cultural interaction, showing for example in the new forms of religious debate and a mixing of cultural influences.[218] Volusianus appears to be a typical example of his culture, a well-educated, moderate pagan aristocrat that refuses baptism but shows no great resistance to Christianity, conveying a rather tolerant view on religion. Volusianus lives his life as a pagan and dies a Christian, a great example of the religious flexibility of his time. Religion was not as zealous a matter to the aristocrat as it

[214] Saturnalia 3.14-17, 6.1-3. Kaster: *Saturnalia*. 2011, p.xxix
[215] Peter Brown: *Aspects of the Christianization.* 1961, p.7.
[216] Lancel: *Saint Augustine.* 1999, p.315.
[217] Alan Cameron: *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2011, pp. 175-177.
[218] Thomas S. Burns: *Rome and the Barbarians 100 BC-AD 400*, The John Hopkins University Press, USA. 2003, pp. 309-320.

was to the Church of the time. Alan Cameron writes that to a Roman aristocrat in late antiquity the idea of an exclusive religion that demands public demonstration and the refusal of other gods and deities would have seemed bizarre to say the least. To the pluralistic aristocrat this level of religious intolerance would have no doubt caused some concern, since religion was both a public duty and a personal affair, not a demonstration of personal faith in public.[219]

Volusianus's mother was however probably a Christian. This is based solely on St. Augustine's letter 132, where Augustine sends his greetings to Volusianus's mother, referring to her as "*sanctae matris tuae*"[220] your sacred mother. This of course is a bit uncertain as evidence, since the term sancta had not been ossified as a Christian term, and Augustine could have simply been politely referring to the respected status of an aristocratic matriarch. Volusianu's mother apparently asked her Christian friends to welcome and befriend her son when he was appointed proconsul of Africa in 411-412.[221] But even if Volusianus's mother's Christianity is not certain and we don't know more about her, not even her name, we do know that his sister, Albina, was a Christian and married Valerius Publicola from the Christian family of the Valerii.[222] The female members of the Valerii family were quite prominent Christians, most famous of them being Saint Melania the Younger, Albina's daughter and Volusianus's niece. Melania's grandmother, Albina's mother-in-law, Melania the Elder (born c.a. 340) was interested in the ascetic movement that had sprung in the Church, and after being widowed travelled to Egypt to visit the desert fathers and continued on to Palestine where she also founded a monastery. The ascetic interest passed on to her grand-daughter, Melania the Younger, who began a celibate life at 20 and went on to found monasteries in Northern Africa and Palestine, and died in Bethlehem December 31st 439.[223]

Volusianus was born in to an aristocratic mixed family which was increasingly typical to post-Constantinian Rome.[224] Peter Brown writes that Volusianus was born to a new generation of nostalgic, pagan Romans who had learned the old ways of Rome from texts and traditions, but had not lived in pre-Christian Empire, and had several connections to Christianity, often even from

[219] Cameron: *The Last Pagans*. 2011, pp. 175-176.
[220] Ep.132.
[221] Alan Kreider: *The Change of Conversion.* 2006, pp 65-69.
[222] PLRE II. p.1184.
[223] PLRE I. pp.592-593.
[224] Lancel: *Saint Augustine*. 1999, p.314-315.

within their own families. According to Brown, Volusianus was born around 380, and was only around 30 during the time of the correspondence. Volusianus shows great discression and understanding towards Christian doctrine in his letter to the Bishop, indicating that he was well familiarized with the faith. He was however equally familiar with his roots and traditions, being part of an interesting ideological controversy of his time. His father before him had also been in correspondence with a great bishop of his time, Ambrose of Milan. In the end of the forth and the beginning of the fifth century the pagan and Christian elite of Rome had grown close, and the two worldviews interacted through bonds of family, friendship and politics. Tension between the two groups had escalated in the fifth century, as Volusianus's generation had seen the sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric and his Visigoths, which was to some extent blamed on Christianity and the neglect of Rome's gods. Volusianus had personally seen his own niece with her husband join the growing movement of ascetism, a decision that had brought scandal close to the illustrious family of the Caeonii.[225] It would seem likely that this new source of conflict mixed with Volusianus's and his and his father's loyalty to tradition and the respectability of their ancient family name would have sparked some of Volusianus's resistance to the new faith, or at least to the intensity of the convert's faith.

Despite the new circumstances in the Empire families like the Caeonii had long roots in classical Roman religion, and proper religious behavior was essential to their tradition. The Caeonii had most probably held several priesthoods in state cults during their history as a senatorial family, as most of the senators had also been state priests. Even though the position could have been, for some, more ceremonial than a matter of personal conviction or calling, it guaranteed influence and respect in the Senate and they were thus highly sought after, ideally passing from father to son. This was a logical connection of offices, since in Roman culture religious and secular matters were closely entwined.[226] The Roman word *religio* originally meant a sense of responsibility and service to a common cause, in this case the survival of Rome through pleasing the gods and the universe by religious practice. The term *religio* did not only apply to matters of faith, but the term was also used to describe commonly agreed ways of interacting with others. Correctly practiced *religio* thus ensured good relations between people and more

[225] Brown: *Aspects of Christianization.* 1961, pp. 6-8.
[226] Michele Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, pp. 2-3.

importantly, between men and the gods.[227] Volusianus's concerns about state security, conveyed by Marcellinus in letter 136[228], fit well into the idea that the primary purpose of religious activity is securing the continued glory and safety of the Empire. Volusianus was concerned about Christian emperors, who according to him had weakened the empire during their reign. Volusianus appears to fear that following Christian doctrine such as turning the other cheek and loving one's enemy was dangerous to the well-being of the state, leaving it vulnerable to the barbarians who might take advantage of Rome if it were to adapt a faith based on avoiding war and forgiving one's attackers. This would make Rome seem weak, and encourage Rome's enemies to follows Alaric's example and try to invade Rome, a devastation that had already traumatized his home.[229]

Much like in the more personal scandalous ascetism of his niece, Melania the Younger, the main point of the opposition towards Christianity was not simply a question of who has the right idea of God, but a question of public responsibility, both in matters of state and the personal reputation and thus authority of the aristocrat and his whole family. Aristocratic families owned great amounts of land both in Italy and in the provinces, and thus were an important element of state economics, controlling vast fields and employing most of the citizens of the Empire. Controlling and keeping under their control the people and resources of their family estates was essential in ensuring the continuity of both their family and their Empire.[230] The Caeonii were certainly aware of their responsibility to their workers and livelihood, so endangering them must have caused aristocrats to feel most uncomfortable, as we see in the case of the scandal of Volusianus's niece.

Despite her later fame as a Christian saint, Melania must have been a source of headache for her illustrious family. Saint Augustine's letters 125[231] and 126[232] show a concern that Melania's family had against her choice of ascetism and the response the Christian community in North Africa had towards it.

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[227] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*, 2012. pp, 23-24.
[228] Translation: "--- *it is evident that such great evils have befallen the state through Christian princes* ---*".* Ep. 136:2.
[229] Ep. 136
[230] Peter Garnsey: Cities, Peasants and Food in Classical Antiquity – essays in social and economic history. Ed. by Walter Scheidel. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1998, pp. 95-100.
[231] Letter 125 was written in the spring of 411 and is from Augustine to the bishop of Thagaste, Alypius, where he is asking him to be understanding of Albina's concern about her daughter. Ep. 125.
[232] Letter 126 is written around the same time, and it is a letter from Augustine to Albina herself. Ep. 126.

Melania's mother, Albina had heard that the Christian people of Hippo were trying to elect by public demand Melania's husband, Pinius, as a priest to the city, much in the same way Augustine had been called by the people of the city to be their priest. Rumors had spread about the couple's intent to donate all of their enormous belongings to the service of the poor, and the people of Hippo were excited about the prospect of having such a rich and generous couple as patrons for the city. Albina wrote to Augustine, expressing her concerns and accusing the people of Hippo of being greedy. Albina must have felt great anguish over the matter, as Augustine writes that "It is right that we should soothe, not increase the sorrow of your mind, a sorrow which you write you cannot explain."[233] He relieves her mind by promising not to ordain Pinius against his will.[234]

Augustine first stresses that no one should neglect their responsibilities towards their family by selling their families fortunes in pursuit of religious piety. Even though he apologizes on behalf of his diocese over the unfortunate debate, he defends them against Albina's accusations that they "did this out of a shameful love of money" saying that Albina was wrong to call a city full of desperate, poor people greedy.[235] Augustine then comes up with a plan, by which Melania and her husband can avoid the patronage without losing face. Augustine suggests that Pinius promises that if he should ever choose to become a priest, he would do so in Hippo.[236] This incident is not found in the hagiography of Melania the Younger herself, which would imply that the matter was a scandalous one, showing the inner tensions of the Caeonii family in relation to Melania's and Pinius's extreme form of Christianity. In the worldview of an ancient Roman aristocratic family, discarding the family's fortune and traditional responsibilities was seen as highly un-honorable. Major families did not only have responsibilities towards their own family members, but also to the often thousands of people that were working on their lands and under their employment. The strength of the family came from their good reputation and substantial land holdings and wealth, and these three factors together ensured continued service in high public office and influence on matters of state, not to mention the importance of the right kind of status for the late antique elite family that was essential to their place among their peers. Melania and Pinius were challenging the safety of this status, adding insult to

[233] Ep. 126: 1.
[234] Ep. 126: 2.
[235] ibid.
[236] Ep. 126

injury by enrolling in the list of the poor in Jerusalem during their journey. The scandal affected Pinius's family as well, and as he gave up his fortunes to start a monastery his brother had to buy all of his staff in order to avoid bringing shame on the family.[237] In this case at least the Christianity of a family member affected the reputation of their family. Albina at least was extremely stressed over her daughter's choice of faith and the level of her and her husband's devotion. The matter was not a fear of the new or the different, but a very real fear of losing someone to an altogether different life. Albina had obviously felt that if Pinian and Melania stay in Hippo and work for the Church they are lost to her, since Augustine asks her: "For, I beg you, why is that presence in our city that Pinian promised burdened with the name of exile, deportation or banishment? I do not think that priesthood is exile."[238]

2.12. Tribune Flavius Marcellinus: Saint Marcellinus of Carthage

Marcellinus was working as tribune and his brother Apringius as proconsul in Carthage in the winter of 411-412 by order of Emperor Honorius at the time of the correspondence between Volusianus, Augustine and himself.[239] While on his commission he became friends with Augustine and Volusianus, receiving Augustine's advice on matters relating to the Donatist rebels[240] and attending common social functions with Volusianus. The conflict between the Donatists and the Catholics must have been the burning topic of Carthage, as Marcellinus, according to Augustine, had to judge matters between the two daily, finally becoming so overwhelmed that he asked Augustine for help. Marcellinus's questions on how to deal with the Donatists in his area sparked Augustine to write his text against the Pelagians, mainly *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*, thus inspiring Augustine's first work against the Pelagians and his theory on grace.[241]

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[237] Kate Cooper: *Poverty, obligation and inheritance: Roman heiresses and the variety of Senatorial Christianity in fifth-century Rome* in Religion, dynasty and patronage in Early Christian Rome 300-900, ed. by Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner, Cambridge University Press, New York, USA. 2007, pp. 165-170.
[238] Ep. 126: 12.
[239] Herbert T. Weiskotten (translation and notes): *The Life of Saint Augustine: A Translation of the Sancti Augustini Vita by Possidus, Bishop of Calama,* Christian Roman Empire Series, Vol. 6, Evolution Publishing, Merchantville New Jersey, USA. 2008, p.75
[240] Ep 133: 1. Augustine ask Marcellinus to be lenient to the donatist rebels of his area.
[241] Boniface: *Saint Augustine.* 2011, pp.74-75.

He was sent to the area to judge the conflict between the Donatist rebels and the prevailing Catholics. The conflict resulted in the Conference of Carthage, where he presided and ruled in favor of the Catholics. This caused allegations of bribery from the Donatist party, eventually leading to Marcellinus' arrest in 413. The Donatist bishops accused Marcellinus and Emperor Honorius of not having given them a fair trial. Possidius's *Sancti Augustini Vita* gives some indication of the existing bias in the trial, as the author shows contempt towards the Donatist bishops for even agreeing to attend the conference, as if he saw no justification for their claims.[242] They also accused Marcellinus of being part of the Heraclian rebellion.[243] After fierce allegations Marcellinus and his brother Apringius were executed quickly and quietly on the 13th of September 413, just a year after the correspondence. Marcellinus influenced Augustine in many writings and made him one of the dedicatees of his book, City of God.[244] Augustine remembers Marcellinus in an emotional and honoring way, writing that he was a "a Christian in his heart and in his life", and continues to praise him by saying "What moral goodness he had, what loyalty in friendship, what zeal for learning, what sincerity in religion!". [245]

2.13. St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

Augustine was born in Thagaste in modern day Algeria in the year 354. He was born into the upper classes and resived a classical education, but his family was not among the richest in the area, and Augustine had to largely rely on his wealthy patron and his own talent and persistence to climb up the social ladder.[246] At the time of his birth, the North African province was crippling under heavy taxes, and the local ruling class was given the unhappy task of managing an already impoverished area.[247] Augustine's father[248] was a pagan, but Augustine's mother Monica[249] was a pious Catholic, earning the title of Saint later on. Even though Monica was a devout Christian, she and her husband did not baptize Augustine, possibly because they did not want Augustine to have any limitations on his future

[242] Weiskotten*: The life of Saint Augustine*. 2008, pp.67-68.
[243] O'Malley: Saints of Africa. 2001, p.75.
[244] Lancel: *Saint Augustine,* 1999. p. 395.
[245] Ep. 151, 8.
[246] Brown: *Augustine of Hippo.* 2000, pp.7-10.
[247] Miles Hollingworth: *The Pilgrim City: St, Augustine of Hippo and his innovation in political thought.* T&T Clark International, London, Great-Britain. 2010, p.148.
[248] Augustine's father died around the year 370. ibid. 2010, p.148.
[249] St. Monica was born in 331 and died in 387. ibid. 2010, p.148,

career. Around the year 372 Augustine had taken up a common-law wife and had a son, Adeodatus at the age of nineteen.[250]

Augustine's remarkable talent for rhetoric made him a famous speaker and teacher at an early age. He eventually moved to Rome and then to Milan, where he studied under the teaching of the bishop of Milan, Ambrose. Through Ambrose's lecture's and sermons Augustine eventually moved from Manicheanism to Catholicism. Ambrose taught him the doctrine of free will and the use of allegories in exegetical analysis, which we can see in his later work.[251] Ambrose baptized Augustine April 24th 387, on Easter. Along with his baptism Augustine decided to live a celibate life and thus leaving his common-law wife who went into a monastery under the protection of the Catholic church. He also renounced his possessions and began the life of a poor, independent intellectual" Here Augustine followed both Christian ascetism and a respected model of the time, great philosophers of old were known to renounce their sexuality and earthly possessions in order to focus on their intellectual aspirations. Augustine's quiet philosophical phase did not last for long however, and in 397 he was convinced to take the diocese of Hippo as his own. As a great rhetoric celebrity of the time, he was a very sought after clergyman.[252]

Augustine's life had changed dramatically in the passing ten years between his conversion and his receiving office as the bishop of Hippo. His long time common-law wife had left, his mother, son and one of his best friends was dead, and Augustine no doubt found himself reflecting on his life and God's role in it. It was at this point in his life that he wrote the Confessions in thirteen books (*Confessionum libri tredecim*). It was very different from the typical Roman intellectual literary genre, but it instantly became popular among the upper classes.[253] Most of our information on the life of St. Augustine is based on this autobiography. In the Confessions Augustine uses the events of his life as an example of his theology on the conversion of the lost into the light, the true faith. The Confessions follows a familiar pattern of a soul in search of God going through the purgatory of its own darkness and finally finding the right way to live. The same theme is found not only in the Bible, for example the story of the prodigal son, but also in antique pagan literature, for example in Virgil's Aeneid.

[250] Brown: *Augustine: Confessions.* 2006, p.xx.
[251] Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the ages.* 1999, p.230.
[252] Brown: *Augustine: Confessions.* 2006, pp.xv-xx.
[253] ibid. 2006, p.xvii.

The book can be divided into three parts. The first part consists of books 1-9, and they deal with Augustine's past life and the lost, searching soul of a young intellectual Roman. The second part, book 10, is about Augustine's present state of mind. The third part, books 11-13 are a work of interpretation on the Genesis. So to simplify, the book is about a confession of sins, a confession of receiving the truth and witnessing it to others and finally a confession of understanding the true faith. The book ends in the Genesis in order for the reader to find spiritual peace in the certainty of God's plan for the world.[254] In the last three books Augustine discusses main points in Christian teaching, the creation of the world and God's plan for salvation, the Trinity, how to interpret biblical teachings and texts and finally love as the principle means to attaining peace and unity with God.[255]

Augustine unfortunately only includes passages of his life that he sees as relevant to his exemplary journey of the soul. Augustine has a typical attitude of an early Christian biographer in the sense that he only gives us the events that are crucial to his theological development, finding God and his idea of human life as a mixture of free choice and God's providence leading the Christian to the right way.[256] Luckily in addition to his autobiography we have a biography by Possidus. Possidus was Augustine's personal secretary for over 40 years, so his biography of Augustine is much more personal and mundane than Augustine's autobiography *Confessions*. It also lacks some of the finer points of typical Christian biographies of the era, mainly the extravagance of language. Possidus writes on the assumption that his readers have already read Augustine's autobiography, and his text begins later on in Augustine's life at the time when he is already well known and respected.[257]

Possidus shows great confidence in Augustine's ability to save the struggling North-African Church. He trusts Augustine's authority and influence in North-Africa and also marks Augustine's importance for the Church and future Christians. Possidus ends the biography with a list of Augustine's writings, including the letters Augustine wrote, both known and lost ones. Possidus succeeded in his endeavor to record Augustine's writings for prosperity, and also

[254] Fitzgerald: *Augustine through the ages.* 1999, p.228.
[255] ibid. 1999, p.232.
[256] ibid. 1999, p. 228.
[257] Deferrari: Early Christian Biographies: Pontius, Paulinus, Possidius, Athanasius, Jerome, Ennodius, Hilary. The Catholic University of America Press, USA. 2001, p.xiii

more importantly for the modern historian, he managed to give us important insight into the person of Augustine.[258]

3.PART B: ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.1. The concern of the pagan aristocratic class in the beginning of the fifth century.

I find that Volusianus's concerns regarding Christianity are both political, cultural and ideological. He is clearly concerned about the survival of Rome, and fears that adopting Christianity fully to the Empire would bring an end to what it means to be Roman. He also expressed concern about the actual ruling abilities of Christian Emperors, and finds that the Empire has suffered under Christian rule.[259] As discussed before, his religious concerns were linked to a time of turmoil under new rule, and Rome had just faced one of her greatest catastrophies, the sack of Rome in 410. The common atmosphere among the pagan aristocrats was that the disaster was at part the fault of Christianity, and this mindset certainly influenced Volusianus as well. Culturally he was concerned about Christian morals and teachings, seeing some of them as un-Roman in nature and even a dangerous show of weakness that the large Empire with many enemies could not afford.[260] Ideologically Volusianus seems to find Christianity a bit odd, and is confounded by some of the less sensible teachings, such as the virgin birth[261], which to an educated aristocrat such as Volusianus must have seemed pure superstitious nonsense. Before I look at these three angles more thoroughly, I will first discuss the process of conversion among the aristocracy in late antiquity Rome.

3.2. Religious statistics from 350's to the beginning of the fifth century

In Michele Salzman's propospographic studies in 2002, it is evident that the majority of Roman aristocratic families (60%) were pagan in the last quarter of the fourth century, especially the families that were from Rome. From these

[258] ibid. 2001, p.xiii
[259] Ep. 135; Ep. 136.
[260] Ep. 136.
[261] Ep. 135.

families, 53% were still pagan at that time. Salzman's study included 414 aristocrats over the years 284-423, whose religious convictions were publicly known.[262] Werner Eck had studied the prosopographies of late antiquity Rome as well, and came to the conclusion that in the beginning of the 4th century the majority of Roman aristocrats were pagan, but the wave of conversion to Christianity among the aristocracy began in the Theodosian era around 350's. Raban von Haehling later concluded that the amount of Christian officials began to outnumber the amount of pagan officials in the empire as late as the last quarter of the 4th century. The statistics that von Haehling used had some flaws, for example certain officials are counted more than once, since one official could have more than one post at a time. Also, before the foundation of one official Church, it is difficult to determine the accurate number of Christians in the aristocracy, since there were no official Church records of membership at the time. Regardless of this, the prosopographical studies of Eck and von Haehling show that slowly but surely after the conversion of Emperor Constantine the number of Christian senators and aristocrats began to rise, reaching its peak in the 500s.[263]

It seems that the older aristocratic families stayed pagan longer that the newer ones that had emerged into the senatorial scene by the fifth century, when the rank of senator was given to new aristocrats and military leaders from the provinces and from conquered tribes. In the beginning of the fourth century Mark Humphries estimates that the Senate had about 600 members who all claimed to belong to the elite families of Rome, and by the beginning of the fifth century this number had almost doubled by the new arrivals with the amount of senators increasing to 1000. The introduction of 400 new senators with varying backgrounds must have been an enormous shift in the way the old families had been used to running the Senate.[264] In Salzman's study, the older families mean the ones that owned estates around Rome that they had acquired through generations. 58% of these aristocratic landowners in Italy were pagan at this time. The families that owned the most land also held most of the state official and senatorial posts. The percentage of these also shows the same conclusion of a high level of pagans in Roman aristocracy, 68% of office holders in the last quarter of

[262] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.7.
[263] T.D. Barnes: *Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy* in *The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol 85.* 1995, pp.135-147.
[264] Humphries: *Roman senators and absent Emperors.* 2003, pp.5-7.

the 4th century was pagan. Only 3% can be counted as converts to Christianity with relative certainty, and only 1% converted from Christianity to paganism.[265]

The fact that this was possible at the time of a Christian emperors shows the relatively high level of religious tolerance in late 4th century Rome after the Edict of Milan in the year 313. The edict allowed freedom of religion for all, Christian and pagan alike. We also have letters and speeches from Emperor Constantine that highlight the importance of religious tolerance and condemn the use of violence or coercion on both ends. Because of the Edict and these very tolerate letters, many scholars have come to the conclusion that religious coercion and violence was mostly an exception to the rule in the end of the 4th century, now occurring mostly between different groups of Christians. Besides the official orders and laws towards religious tolerance, according to S. Bradbury this is also because in late antiquity Rome the various religious cults and worship practices had begun to assimilate to one another, and the differences between practices were narrowing decade by decade.[266]

Among the aristocratic class, the networks of friendships between families had remained or formed despite religious affiliations. For the Roman aristocrat, social status and the image he had among his peers was the most important thing in maintaining his position in power. Even with the aristocracy's strong concern for tradition, in a pluralistic empire religious freedom had reached the point where members of the two religions could form networks of friendship with each other, for example we find multiple courtesies and mutual favors in the correspondence between senator Symmachus and bishop Ambrose despite the fact that they were opponents in the controversy about the Altar of Victory.[267]

3.3. Conversion of the Roman aristocracy

In the end of the 4th century the pagan Roman aristocracy was faced with a delicate balancing act between tradition, paganism and being in favor of the newly Christian court. Alan Cameron writes that even though the shift in state religion was immense, the popular idea of a pagan revival and dramatic opposition is largely assumed but not proven. Christianity and traditional paganism lived side by side for long, and old traditions were upheld and practiced fairly actively

[265] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.7-8.
[266] Harold Drake: *Church and Empire*. Chapter 22 in The Oxford handbook for early Christian studies, Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2008, pp.451-453.
[267]Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.15.

despite the official shift in religion, as we can see for example in the list of pagan festivals in the Codex-Calendar of 354 that we discussed before. The previous theory of violent opposition has been replaced with a theory of gradual integration and assimilation on both sides, [268] Setting the pagan and Christian sides in a cultural war was not necessary, and would not have been practical. Even though Emperor Consatantine had made Christianity the Emperor's religion, the majority of Roman aristocracy were still adherents of traditional paganism.[269] And the faith of the leaders of the city, the Senate, was not a light thing to temper with.

In an Empire the size of a small continent efficiency was key. Delegation of power had always been central to Roman government and as the emperors' role in the city lessened, the Senate's increased. The Emperor was far and occupied with a vast Empire, and needed his Senate and it's wealthy and influential senators to run the city and their provinces in the Empire as smoothly as possible. After Constantine the Great left Rome for Constantinople, the city was no longer the imperial center for government, but even before that emperors had begun to relocate their courts outside the city. Humphries counted that between 284 and 410 imperial visits to Rome were as few as thirteen. The absent emperors were honored by festivities, statues and building dedications, but the people of Rome rarely saw their Emperor. Rome was however the mental heart of the Empire, and the Senate's role as a mediator of the people's needs to the Emperor was stressed, and thus also their influence in Roman politics.[270]

Salzman concluded that despite of the growing popularity of Christianity, the government had a strong political interest to respect the traditional institutions and cults in Rome that the pagan part of the Senate was still very much attached to.[271] The previously persistent view in late antiquity scholarship of an aggressive clash between the two faiths has, in the light of the research I have read, proven itself false. The later historical narrative was in the hands of the new Christian world, and especially early Christian writing had a tendency to accentuate Christianity's triumph over the oppression and resistance of the pagan Rome. This, according to contemporary sources does not seem to have been the case, but the era is, in my opinion, is more characterized by a fairly quiet and gradual mix

[268] Salzman: *On Roman Time.* 1990, pp.16-22.
[269] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian aristocracy*, 2002. p.7.
[270] Mark Humphries: *Roman Senators and Absent Emperors*. 2006, pp.27-46.
[271] Michele Salzman: *Structuring Time*. 2013, pp.495-496.

of mild toleration and mutual interchange between the traditions that were in ever growing day-to-day contact with each other.

Many of the conflicts concerning pagan aristocracy and Christian rulers had a more pragmatic and political motivation than a religious or cultural one, even though they no doubt played a significant role as well. The idea of a radical pagan revival is, according to Cameron, based mostly on myth rather than factual evidence.[272] This would mean that the slow conversion of the pagan elite was a gradual, social movement towards what was quickly becoming the mainstream religion of the Empire. As Cameron states, for the aristocrats that hoped to have a serious career in the new Christian government, "there was no battle pagans could hope to win".[273] This by no means meant that the transformation in state religion was a pleasant or desirable one for all aristocrats, even though it was somewhat subtle and voluntary.

The existing opposition from the pagan side must have seen the new faith as an un-Roman trend that could not be won but under which they did not want to lose their cultural inheritage. Christianity had had at worst a strongly negative and at best an intriguing or indifferent reputation among the elite in earlier centuries. As Christianity began to break out into the public sphere in the first two centuries, it was widely seen as just another foreign cult. As Salzman wrote, before the reign of Emperor Constantine we have very little sources from pagan authors. The first long, serious philosophical polemic against Christianity was form Celsus[274] around the year 175-181, called *The True Doctrine*, against which Origen wrote his *Contra Celsum*. According to Salzman the lack of pagan sources about Christianity indicated, that before Constantine's conversion pagan intellectuals did not see Christianity as a significant part of the empire.[275]

The unfavorable reputation it had was also in part due to its perceived abandonment of its Jewish heritage. Among the Roman elite Christianity was a renegade cult that had forsaken its ancestors and roots and thus the only respectable aspect of this foreign religion, its historical justification. Judaism was also discarded as a foreign religion, but it had some authority in the eyes or the

[272] Cameron, Alan. *The last pagans*. 2011, pp.5-9.
[273] ibid. 2011, p.12.
[274] Celsus wrote that "*the foolish, the dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children are attached to the deficient doctrines of Christianity.*" Cited from Celsus: The True Doctrine, 3.44. Ross Shepard Kraemer: *Women and* gender in The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 2008, p.472.
[275] Salzman: *Pagans and Christians.* 2008, pp.195-194.

Roman intellectual elite because of its long history, spanning across thousands of years, which showed in the special privileges given to the Jews of the Empire, mainly that they did not need to perform the sanctioned sacrifice to the Emperor. Christianity had the negative label of foreign, but not the authority of a long ancestry that the Roman culture valued. The other reason Christianity had such a bad reputation was the label of superstition. For the Romans, superstition was the sign of unintelligence. As the philosopher Plutarch wrote in the first century in his book *On Superstition*, atheism and superstition are both terrible things, but superstition was even worse, since atheism was the result of an intellectual error whereas superstition came from pure emotion and irrationality.[276]

The aristocracy did not only have a hard time accepting Christianity because of its poor reputation, they had pragmatic and cultural reasons as well. According to Salzman, the Roman aristocracy was an unlikely candidate for conversion into Christianity because of the senatorial class' long traditions and a culture of upholding the state cults and old worship practices going back generations.[277]. Upholding the traditional state cult was not only a matter of personal belief, but also a political issue. In late antiquity Rome, it was believed that a proper manner of worship was essential to maintaining the stability of the empire and securing the gods' protection for the people of Rome. The imperial government had an obligation to make sure that Rome was in the favor of the gods or the supreme deity, so state officials were not only political figures but had religious duties as well.[278]

Thus the Senate in Rome was characteristically religious as well. The Senate's tight bond with traditional Roman religion is clearly shown in the conflict surrounding the removal of the pagan Altar of Victory from the Senate in the year 382 by order of the Emperor Gratian. The same altar had previously been removed in 357 by Emperor Constantine II, but later restored. Gratian also stopped state funding of pagan cults, which led to a protest by prominent pagan senators led by senator Symmachus.[279] The removal of the altar did not only cause spiritual concern, but pragmatic, political concern too. It had been returned to the Senate earlier despite the fact that during the time of the conflict the Emperor and the government were Christian. Despite these two concerns however, Salzman

[276]Bediako, Kwame. *Theology and identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and in Modern Africa.* 1999, pp.15-27.
[277]Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, pp.2-3.
[278]Drake: *Church and Empire*. 2008, pp.455-456.
[279]Cameron: *The last pagans*. 2011, pp. 5-8.

also states that the return of the altar was also a matter of appeasement towards the concerns that the senators had about the drastic change in state religion and their way of life.[280] This conflict shows that even as late as the 4th century, the traditional pagan faith was not only a matter or religion, but a matter of state security and the preservation of the Senate.[281] Thus the senatorial class in Rome could not choose their faith on merely personal and convictional basis, but they had to take into account also the welfare of the state, which was believed to be linked to the religion they practiced.

Despite this loyalty to the traditions and practices of their ancestors, the Roman aristocracy had undergone a subtle change in the past few decades. As Christianity had grown more popular and especially after it had become the religion of the Emperor and his Court, little by little members of old senatorial families had begun to convert to the new faith. Rome itself was living in a time of "rapid religious change" as Peter Brown put it, despite the aristocracy's ideal of permanence and an unchanging religion of Rome.[282] Even with Christianity's relatively bad historical reputation among the traditional pagan elite, we do have evidence of an existing class of aristocratic Christians in the late 300s. There are some accurately dated material evidences such as the Codex-Calendar of 354, that along with the pagan state festivities mentions the days of Easter and a list of the bishops of Rome. The calendar was made for a Christian aristocrat named Valentinus and had dedication texts referring to one God. The calendar is remarkable because it shows both pagan and Christian rituals side by side, with the pagan material gathered at the beginning and the Christian material at the end.[283]

We also have other literary evidence such as the text by Jerome that he wrote during his visit to Rome in the years 382-385. In this text, Jerome talks about the vanity and greed of rich Christian widows and the members of clergy who wrongly benefit from it. The text shows that there already existed a group of wealthy Christians and rich patrons from prominent families in high levels of society for greedy priests to take advantage from and for Jerome to scold.[284] It would thus seem, that even though among the oldest and most traditional families

[280]Salzman: *Pagans and Christians.* 2008, pp.192.
[281]Brown: *Aspects of Christianization.* 1961, pp.1.
[282]Brown: *Aspects of Christianization.* 1961, p.2.
[283] The dedication is: *Valentine floreas in Deo, Valentine lege feliciter, Valentine vivas floreas, Valentine vivas gaudeas*. Salzman: *On Roman Time.* 1990, pp.24-27.
[284] Cameron: *The last pagans.* 2001, pp.185-186.

the change in state religion was not that agreeable, it was well on its way, changing Roman aristocracy slowly but surely.

3.4. Mixed families: Pagans and Christians in the same household

An important factor in the gradual shift from a pagan aristocracy into a Christian one was intermarriage between pagans and Christians. Mostly among the aristocrats Salzman studied in 2002, people tended to marry members of their own faith, but there were cases of mixed marriages.[285] For example in the publicly proud pagan family of Caeonii two sons married Christian women in the end of the 4th century, Volusianus's father Caeionius Rufius Albinus and his brother and Volusianus's uncle, Publilius Caeionius Caeccina, whose daughter Laeta (Volusianus's cousin) and her daughter Paula were famous Christian aristocrats of their time who we know mostly from Jerome's letters. Family life in these mixed families included both cultural identities, since the Christian wives of pagan aristocrats were mostly allowed to practice their faith. According to Brown, there could be three reasons why this was possible. First, the husbands might have simply been religiously tolerant towards the faith of their wives, even if they themselves were pagan. This would fall well into the theory of high religious tolerance in late 4th century Rome as discussed before. Secondly, it could indicate the ability of the bride's Christian parents to persuade her future in-laws to allow her faith. Lastly, passing on religious traditions to the sons, the heirs and upholders of the family, was the fathers responsibility. The Christian faith of the mother was not necessarily a threat to the continuation of the senatorship and state office of the son, so the fathers could afford to be more tolerant. For example, in the case of senator Volusianus, whose father Rufius Albinus was a notable pagan aristocrat, probably had a Christian mother or she at least was favorable to the faith, and more importantly his sister Albina who not only married a Christian aristocrat Publicanus, but also was the mother of the saint Melania the Younger. There was no reason to forbid the marriage of the daughter of a pagan father to a Christian, because the senatorship was passed down to the son, Volusianus, who remained pagan like his father and thus the family name and tradition was

[285] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.15.

preserved.[286] So in general, as long as the male procession was not endangered, the faith of the female members of the family was less significant.

Still, the important role of women on the conversion of the aristocracy has been a popular theory among scholars. Certain evidence would seem to support this, according to Salzman the fact that basically all the texts written by women in late antiquity were written by Christian women, whereas virtually none were from pagan women, it would suggest that aristocratic women were more aligned with Christianity than paganism.[287] This could of course simply mean that Christian women were more eager writers than their pagan sisters, or that the majority of surviving texts from female authors of the time happen to be Christian. The idea that women were the catalyst for the conversion of their pagan family members and fellow aristocrats could stem from the apparent fervor and proactivity the era's Christian aristocratic women showed in taking active part in religious discussion. In the study of early Christianity, one can get an image of" a fateful collaboration" as Kate Cooper puts it, between the political and influence clergy and high-level aristocratic women who moved the Empire towards Christianity. However, she states that the findings of Salzman show, that we have no evidence to suggest that intermarriage was a significant role in the conversion of the male aristocrats, since there are hardly any sources indicating that intermarriage led to many husbands converting by the influence of their wives. The lack of sources describing such conversions is one key factor in dismantling this myth, also the sources we do have are scarce,[288]and due to their literary genre, which was mostly apologetic of hagiographical, susceptible to rhetorical editing.[289] According to Salzman the norm seems to be that sons of pagan fathers and Christian mothers followed the faith of their father, whereas the daughters often followed the faith of their mother.[290] The previous theory by Brown about the religious variability between spouses and other members of the family would fit in with this as well.

Intermarriage had however changed the nature of aristocratic families in religious terms. Again we return to the example of senator Volusianus. He was a

[286]Brown: *Aspects of Christianization.* 1961, pp.5-8.
[287] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.11.
[288]The correspondence of the Church father Jerome only had one mention of an aristocratic pagan husband converting to Christianity apparently due to the influence of his wife Laeta. Even this is not however indisputable when studying the text. Cooper, Kate. *Insinuations of womanly Influence: an aspect of the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy in The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 82.* 1992, p. 150.
[289] ibid. 1992, p.150.
[290] Salzman: *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy.* 2002, p.146.

part of a new generation of pagans, that were young men at the time of the catastrophe of the sack of Rome. Brown estimates that Volusianus was born in the 380s, which would mean that he was already in his thirties or early forties. He was born into a mixed family of Christians and pagans. His father, as mentioned before, was a pagan senator. He was apparently fairly active in his traditional duties, as Rutilius Namantius mentions him and also Volusianus in *De Reditu suo*, written in 415, as the pagans that caused him to believe in the continuation of Rome. Volusianus' mother was however a Christian, his sister married a Christian and converted, and his niece was later canonized as a saint and lived an ascetic Christian life with her husband.[291] The Caeonii was thus a good example of a mixed family, which shows in Volusianus' and Augustine's correspondence. Augustine is responding to somewhat informed questions that Volusianus had about the Christian doctrine. This could of course be because he was highly educated and could have learned about the new official faith's doctrine, but it is more likely that he had been introduced to Christian thought in his own family. In fact, Volusianus' sister Albina had been in correspondence with Augustine before, they had fled the aftermath of the sack of Rome to Thagaste in modern day Algeria, the same town Augustine was born in.[292]

The relationship between pagan aristocrats and Christian aristocrats was relatively established at the end of the 4th century. Volusianus' father was also in correspondence with Christian influences, mainly bishop Ambrose in Milan. Despite his family's ties with Christian bishops and the Christianity of his female family members, Volusianus is told to have converted only at his deathbed in year 437. His conversion is reported in Gerontius's *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*, the hagiography of his niece Melania the Younger. The text doesn't indicate a strong religious conversion, it seems that Volusianus converts somewhat reluctantly and almost as a matter that does not move him greatly. Melania is visiting his uncle in Constantinople during the rule of Emperor Theodosian II while he and his niece are in Constantinople helping the Emperor in negotiations over a royal marriage.[293] Even though naturally we cannot know the depth of Volusianus' conviction, it would seem that Volusianus' life follows the general trend of pagan aristocrats in 4th and 5th centuries; choosing a faith was largely a matter of submission to the present state of affairs, not so much personal decision, one that

[291] Brown: *Aspects of Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy.* 1961, pp.7.
[292] Ep. 124.
[293] Brown: *Aspects of Christianization:* 1961, pp.7-8.

was aimed at preserving the position of the family in offices of power and among civilized society that was now largely Christian.

3.5. Political concern: The decline of Rome under Christian rule

Volusianus was first and foremost a Roman official, and he had seen his homeland weakened by divided imperial rule, religious turmoil among the different sects of this new religion and barbarian invasions culminating in the sack of Rome. Volusianus, according to Marcellinus, was afraid that Rome could not thrive under Christian Emperors.[294] As I discussed before, the sack of Rome that was still a very fresh trauma during the time of the correspondence, was generally blamed on the adoption of a foreign religion and the abandonment of Rome's protectors, her gods. The faith of the Emperor and thus the religious policies of the state were not just philosophical debates or pious sentiments, but the state's religious policies were seen as a vital part of the Empire's defense system. As Symmachus writes in his Third Relatio, "Who is so friendly with the barbarians as not to require an Altar of Victory?"[295] Symmachus further emphasizes the importance of traditional religion in protecting Rome, speaking in the voice of Rome herself, and writes: "This worship subdued the world to my laws, these sacred rites repelled Hannibal from the walls, and the Senones from the capitol."[296] Religion was used as an argument for the Christian side of state politics as well, the Church's view was that a strong Empire was a Christian Empire, and for example bishop Ambrose wrote that Rome's current suffering was because of the continued practice of paganism, even insisting that Christians had been less affected by attacks because they were faithful to God.[297] But in the Senate and in the minds of the pagan aristocrats, Rome was only as strong as the support it received from her traditional gods, and neglecting them was seen to devastate military campaigns, defense and even the very lifeline of the Empire, it's crops and agriculture, as Symmachus writes: "For the support of the priests was a blessing to the produce of the earth, and was rather an insurance than a

[294] Ep. 136. Translated quote:" He, *therefore, thinks that all these points can be added to that one question insofar as it is evident that such great evils have befallen the state through Christian princes who for the most part have observed the Christian religion, even if he says nothing about this aspect."*
[295] Symmachus: Third Relatio, 4.
[296] Symmachus: Third Relatio, 9.
[297] Mattox: *St. Augustine and the Theory of Just War*. Continuum Books, New York, USA. 2006, p.19.

bounty."[298] The Church had thus removed the Senate's ability to protect Rome, since it was impossible without the help of the gods that could now abandon Rome after such neglect, a scenario many saw as being the cause of the Visigoth attack in 410.[299]

Volusianus seems, however, more concerned about the actual ruling abilities of the Christian Emperors.[300] As discussed before, after Constantine the Great only Emperor Julian was publicly a devout pagan, and among the pagan aristocrats he was revered as the most cultured and educated Emperor since the great Marcus Aurelius.[301] When the pagan aristocrats compared his policies that were not only favorable, but down right enforcing to the pagan rites, even supporting practices that had largely disappeared from practice such as the Oracle of Delfoi, to the suppressive policies of Emperors such as Gratian, who separated the state from the official practice of paganism[302] The pagan Emperor obviously did not hold Christianity in high regard, but he did not significantly reduce the religious rights of Christian citizens[303], whereas Christian Emperors made concrete efforts to pluck pagan practice from the Empire, along with Gratian the most aggressive act against pagans was the law that Emperor Theodosius passed that forbid pagan practice in public.[304] These actions did not cause religious violence, at least widely, but they certainly caused an uproar among pagans, as we can see for example in Symmachus's Third Relatio. This, combined with the problems Christians were causing by fighting each other throughout the Empire, including the conflict between Donatists and Catholics in North Africa during Volusianus's commission that resulted in the death of an imperial official[305], seems like an understandable reason to be doubtful in the Christian emperors' ability to maintain peace and stability of Rome. In state politics they were often led by their faith, not by the absolute interest of the whole Empire.

Where politics was involved, Volusianus and his class had grown up in an ideal of a powerful and intelligent Senate, men from long ancestries who knew

[298] Symmachus: Third Relatio, 15.
[299] Castrén: *Uusi antiikin käsikirja*. 2011, p.559.
[300] Ep. 136:2.
[301] Castrén: *Uusi Antiikin historia.* 2011, pp.529-535.
[302] Brown: *Through the Eye of a Needle*. 2012. pp.103-104.
[303] Julian's actions against Christianity had not influenced religious practice, it had been more in the form of economic sanctions, mainly confiscations, and certain discriminative actions regarding Christian teachers in 362. Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot Antiikin Roomassa*, p. 332 ; Smith: *Julian's God*. 1995, pp.179-180.
[304] Hedrick: *History and silence*. 2000. p.6.
[305] Evers: *Augustine on the Church*. 2012, p.378

how to manage the affairs of Rome, with the help of Rome's gods of course. The Senate was the heart that kept the eternal city going, and its senators took great pride in being the protectors of Rome. And even though the Christianity of Constantine the Great probably had no influence in his decision to move his court to Constantinople, it was still apparent that after the procession of Christian Emperors Rome no longer saw much of her princes, and with the divide in power between the two capitols the Senate lost some of their significance as well. The office of senator was now also available to new classes, and according to Humphries the senators had to get used to men of lower rank being their equals.[306] This and the loss of tradition that affected the class both privately and in public (the senators were no longer revered as religious authorities and state cult priests as Gratian ended state support for them) meant that the everyday life of the Roman aristocrat differed greatly from their life in the pre-Christian Empire, and this must have caused some suspicion towards the new Christian rule.

Volusianus, however, was raised in a Christian Empire altogether. The only link that he would have had with the traditional Senate with sacrifices and omens would be from books and from stories from his father and grand-father.[307] In the Senate he worked for there were already Christians and people from foreign cultures, but at least the Senate still functioned and had actual power. What might have caused some concern among the fifth century aristocrats could be the Church, which was a growing entity in the political scene. The example of Bishop Ambrose and his enormous influence over the court and the Emperor had made it apparent that the Church and its' leaders were a force to be reckoned with. The bishop was able to influence the Emperor more than a city prefect and revered noble man, Symmachus, and the entire Roman Senate could.[308] The Church was a strong lobbying organization, and it gained considerable say in the court. Especially the local bishops were very efficient in influencing their local aristocrats, and thus were able to affect the religious circumstances in their diocese, just like Augustine. Kahlos, Hänninen and Lehtonen suggest that bishops were, at times, even the leaders behind Christian riots that killed pagan priests and destroyed pagan holy sites.[309] If these senators that saw themselves as the

[306] Humphries: *Roman Senators and absent Emperors.* 2003, pp.31-33.
[307] Volusianus's father was among the circle of Symmachus, and would have seen firsthand the change in Senate sessions after and before the removal of the Altar of Victory. Brown: *Aspects of Christianization*. 1961. p.6.
[308] Peter Brown: *Through the Eye of the Needle*. 2012, pp.104-105
[309] Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: *Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa*, 2011, pp.352-353.

protectors of Rome felt that the Emperor and the Church had taken some of their power, the devastation that happened in 410 seemed even more terrible when combined with a sense of seeing the Empire suffering and not being able to prevent it. They had lost a big part of their influence to an institution that had not yet proven itself trustworthy in their eyes.

Volusianus does not mention the concern he has for the Roman state himself in letter 134, but Marcellinus writes that he had spoken of the matter during the symposium.[310] It might have been that Volusianus was being polite and did not want to offend Augustine who was connected to his social circle and was after all, a man of respected rank if not as high as Volusianus, or he did not need Augustine's information or opinion on the matter. Marcellinus writes that Volusianus was also concerned about how Christian teachings would impact the safety of the Empire According to him, if Rome were to follow the rules of turning the other cheek when attacked, distributing her wealth commonly among all, freeing the slaves and being lenient to criminals, she would lose all respectability in the eyes of the barbarians and Rome would be the target for even more terrible invasions like the Visigoths in 410. [311]

3.6. Cultural concern: Rome in the hands of irrational men

Christianity was not only potentially dangerous for Volusianus, but very odd as well. He writes that he and the other quests at the symposium were confounded about many of the teachings, and his questions show that many Christian concepts were just too different for an educated, aristocratic Roman to swallow. As discussed before, Christianity in Rome was introduced by a foreign element, and it had certainly not been the choice of the elite in the beginning. For the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity was either ignored, scuffed at as a religion for hysterical women and desperate slaves, or tolerated as an eccentric cult.[312] It was a new and odd eastern cult, that seemed to inspire reckless behavior and most un-Roman conduct. Conduct, like the embarrassing behavior of Volusianus's niece Melania and her husband Pinius, was not only emotion-based hysteria but

[310] Ep. 136
[311] Ep. 136
[312] Kraemer: *Women and* gender. 2008, p.472; Bediako: *Theology and identity.* 1999, pp.15-27.

also a liability for his family and their good name.[313] Rome had always known a great variety of religions and gods, and had very rarely limited the religious behavior of her citizens. Aristocrats such as Volusianus no doubt knew people who were practicing different versions of paganism[314] and other religions, but Christianity seemed to be the only one that made people act so un appropriately, like Melania whose faith inspired her to leave their fortune, live an ascetic life and even practice celibacy in her marriage, a concept that was most foreign for aristocratic Romans.[315]

This level of irresponsible devotion to Christianity was only annoying and embarrassing, the doctrine these people were following was also seen as simple intellectual nonsense. This, after all, was a religion of people rising from the dead, God walking among us as a poor carpenter, born out of a Galilean virgin and crucified to a cross like a common criminal. Volusianus must have seen these teaching as fantastical at best and idiotic at worst. He asks Augustine how it could be possible that Mary was a virgin when she was pregnant and a virgin after she gave birth.[316] The aristocrat of the Roman Empire was surely well educated in science, thus also in medicine and human anatomy, and he surely would have not bought the idea of someone getting pregnant without intercourse and let alone remaining one after giving birth to a child.[317] Handing over rule of the land to irrational, emotional and, for some, a bit unintelligent group of religious fanatics was the last thing the Roman aristocrat would want to do. Roman tradition took pride in being rational and above basic human emotions when it came to running the Empire. The *mos maiorum*, the memory of their ancestors, demanded the continuation of state politics in accordance with the Roman virtues. In this light at least *gravitas*, proper speech and conduct of one's class and *humanitas*, acting in accordance to all knowledge and reason learned from classical culture and Roman history, were endangered.[318]

[313] Cooper: *Poverty, obligation and inheritance*. 2007, pp. 165-170.
[314] For example, the contemporary of Volusianus's father and another member of the circle of Symmachus, Praetextatus, who was an enthusiastic member of the cult of Mithra. Maas: *Readings in Late Antiquity.* 2000, p. 173.
[315] PLRE I. pp.592-593.; Brown, *Aspects of Christianization.* 1961, pp. 6-8.;
[316] Ep. 134.
[317] Too: *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, 2001, p. 263.; Gangel, Benson: *Christian education.* 2002, pp. 33-36.
[318] Castrén: *Uusi antiikin käsikirja*. 2012, pp. 312-313.

3.7. Philosophical concern: an irrational religion for an irrational God

For Volusianus, Christianity was not only un-Roman and foreign, it was also inconsistent and disloyal to its roots. Marcellinus writes that Volusianus found it strange that the Christian God would command a certain type of piety and sacrifice in the Old Testament but completely disregard the former orders he had given in the New Testament.[319] When a Roman aristocrat described divinity, he most certainly would not have called it fickle. Late antiquity was philosophically the time of Neoplatonism, and the idea of God in this new form of Platonism was transcendent, supreme, all-knowing and eternal, not an angry and inconsistent one.[320]

The pagan Neoplatonist view on religion was quite tolerant, since as discussed before, they saw all religions as being a representation of the supreme deity in the world. This deity did not need names or doctrines, but it was a common ruling power in the universe, above human descriptions and emotions. It was therefore not necessary for people to fight among themselves when disagreeing with each other's religious views, since they all were just trying to express the sense of divinity they felt. Religious violence was seen as unsettling and uncivilized, and the amount of religious persecution against pagans and between groups of Christians were a demonstration of the weaker mindset of the Christians, the same kind as Celsus had ridiculed decades ago and Emperor Julian had banned from teaching classical arts and philosophy because of their lower understanding and clouded mind in regard to the subject.[321]

4. CONCLUSION

Volusianus's concerns about Christianity are practical, not spiritual. In my view, his true concern shows better in letter 136 from Marcellinus to Augustine. In his own letter he asks Augustine mainly about the reasoning and philosophy behind Christianity, and as a civilized member of a revered class, shows polite interest after Augustine himself asks him to write back. He does not cross any lines or say anything too accusatory against the new official faith, the faith of the Emperor

[319] Ep. 136.
[320] Drobner: *Christian philosophy*. 2008, pp ; Hänninen, Kahlos, Lehtonen: Uskonnot antiikin Roomassa. 2012. p.316.
[321] Harmless: *Augustine*. 2014, pp.135-136.; Kraemer: *Women and* gender. 2008, p.472; Smith: *Julian's God*. 1995, pp.179-180.

who employs him. Even though he, as an aristocratic Roman, certainly was not in direct fear of any coercion from the court, he would not have wanted to deliberately insult Christianity. I believe his letter is a polite answer to an important person of the area he is assigned to and who is a friend of his mother, sister, and members of his North African social circle, including Marcellinus. But he throws in a challenge in the end, telling the bishop his very reputation is in line depending on whether or not his answer is sufficient. It is as courteous a challenge one could make, and Volusianus does not let his true feelings show. Marcellinus, however, writes about the concern he had as a Roman official, a member of the senatorial class whose survival depended on the survival of Rome. He has grown up in a family of senators, and had seen both in his childhood and during his own career the impacts of Christian emperors, and was not convinced. He sees them as lesser rulers who have not increased the glory of Rome, but had led her to many difficulties. The attack of 410 was still fresh in his mind, and even though he certainly would not have said it out loud, he must have at least understood why so many of his class and of the ordinary citizens of the city felt that the catastrophe was the fault of Christianity.

Christian rule had indeed proven itself bias at times. It had banned a religious practice of a very influential class, and step by step made practicing the traditions of their ancestors impossible. The aristocratic class saw and felt themselves as the core of Rome, and in many aspects rightly so. They had been the priests and protectors of Rome for as long as she had existed, and now that role was being stolen due to absent imperial rule by a new and foreign entity, the Church. Augustine is careful to show every respect and courtesy to the old ruling class and addressed Volusianus, a *vir illustris*, as his superior in rank and only takes the authority of age and being a holy man when he calls Volusianus his son. The Church needed the support of the aristocratic class in order to become as influential as they did, it could not rely on the sympathies of Christian emperors alone. The Senate ruled Rome, and if the Church wanted the same status it could not afford to lose the already disrupted good relations with the existing elite. Augustine is obviously interested in winning over Volusianus, and as wee se both in practice in these kinds of personal letter from Augustine as well as in formulated theory in *De Catehizandis Rudibus*, he is willing to bend the corners of Christian teaching to entice interest to join the new winning party and convert to Christianity.

Augustine needed to win over the intellect of Volusianus, and since he asks him to explain the reasoning behind Christianity, Augustine replies with all of his talent in rhetoric and presents the great philosophy behind the faith. Like he advises Deogratias, one should treat the aristocratic prospective convert as a respected equal, and appeal to him as a learned man, not as a holy or superior man of the cloth. He writes that Deogratias should emphasize the metaphorical and allegorical aspects of the holy texts, and introduce them to the aristocrat rather as philosophical teachings that lead to great prosperity of mind, a peaceful soul and a sound society. Volusianus was concerned that turning the other cheek was not good policy against invading barbarians, and that forsaking all wealth and sharing all was not a wise economic signal to give to others who would take advantage of such a utopia. Augustine cannot explain these teachings away from the holy texts, so he explains them as guidelines rather than actual rules. Like in the case of his niece and the scandal at Hippo where in his response to Albina Augustine loosens the teaching to forsake all wealth and writes that one should not be careless with fortune, Augustine strays away from the literal interpretation and into the allegorical one. Even though Christ indeed tells people not to take up the sword, but to love one's enemy and turn the other cheek, Augustine explains that this is not that literal, and just war is not against the law of God. Romans would not have to only forgive trespasses against the Empire, but defending the Christian Rome would not offend God. Loving one's enemy is more an inner sense of tranquility one feels when feeling the supreme love and the beauty of the philosophy that is Christ.

Beauty aside, Christianity definitely included teachings that were not lovely moral advice, but simply absurd. Volusianus writes that he does not comprehend how the ruler of the universe could leave his throne and come down to live among us mortals as a poor man, live like a normal person, be arrested, tortured and finally crucified as a criminal. How could God, the supreme deity that according to Neoplatonism was eternal, transcendent and completely beyond the frailties of humans, be lowered so? And if he was here, then he could not have been ruling the universe, and the universe could not be left un-ruled. Augustine was philosophically raised in Neoplatonism as well, and this was something he certainly had wondered himself. This, and the difficult question about the virginity of Mary, Augustine does not turn into metaphors, but he explains with how they actually support the idea of one supreme being to whom all is possible.

Since God is so greatly beyond anything mere humans could understand, he needed to come down and teach us in human form, and he did so at a pre-determined point in salvation history. He had not, as Marcellinus tells us Volusianus had claimed, forsaken the old laws he gave the Jews, but the Old Testament and the New Testament tells us of a divine plan for the world, a line of events from original sin all the way to Christ, the fulfilment of the Logos, the Word of God. He needed to be crucified and then resurrected so that we could have true faith and thus overcome death and reach a higher understanding through the love of God. This love was the core of the gospels. The Christian God is presented as the culmination of our understanding of divinity, and links to Neoplatonism were Christianity's credentials in being the ones who have reached this understanding. This sense of tranquility and inner peace will lead to good deeds and good citizens, and result in a harmonious state, a city of God here on Earth.

But the harsh reality for the aristocrats like Volusianus was that Christianity had not brought with it a city of God, but a slowly deteriorating Empire and a forgotten city of Rome. He does not seem to have any great negative feelings towards Christianity, and he eventually converts himself at his deathbed, though with lack of enthusiasm. He was grown up and worked with Christians and his family was made up of both religions. He does not resist the faith or the morals, but the problems it causes. It had robbed him his heritage, it had acted coercively against his class and violently among its sects causing turmoil and problems for the Empire. He has no reason to be enthusiastic towards what he seems to see as un-rational and potentially harmful. But to his generation, the issue is not as raw as it was for their fathers, and Volusianus does not seem to oppose Christianity with any enthusiasm either. Beside polite philosophical correspondence and concerns about Rome conveyed by Marcellinus, he stays out of religious politics as far as we know, and his conversion is subtle, either an effort to please his niece or an actual wish to follow Christ. He was at his deathbed, and there was nothing anyone could have held over the head of a *vir illustris* of such high social rank that would have forced him to convert. Maybe Christianity had convinced him during his life or then it was simply the thing to do among the aristocracy at the time when the last shreds of pagan opposition and nostalgic symposiums remembering the pagan past had slowly vanished little by little. At the time of the correspondence it had been a new, but consistent whim of the court, a fairly

harmless but foreign teaching that had eaten away at Roman tradition since the conflict of the Altar of Victory. At the time it must not have been that compelling.

Whatever the reason, Volusianus like most of his class converted, and after the second half of the fifth century paganism was rarer among the class than Christianity. The pagan past that they remembered at the symposiums had indeed been defeated by Christianity, not with great conflict or religious wars but by slow assimilation, cultural interaction and personal relationships. Once the imperial rule became dominantly Christian, the culture naturally started shifting, the Church became involved and Rome changed. Despite of a few instances in the late antiquity with violence between pagans and Christians, the transition happened quite peacefully, with only verbal debates and delegations of senators with complaints over their cultural heritage. But the loss of the old traditional Roman culture was to some extent realized for Volusianus and his class, and even though paganism had left its legacy on the new religious practice, it would never be restored to the position it had held in the Empire of Rome, and neither would the old pagan aristocracy if it would not have followed the times. But the memory of the culture of their ancestors and the eternal city of Rome remained.

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